

**The History of Peasants, *Tonton Makouts*, and the Rise and Fall of the Duvalier  
Dictatorship in Haiti**

**by**

**Marvin Chochotte**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(History)  
in the University of Michigan  
2017**

**Doctoral Committee:**

**Associate Professor Richard Turits, Chair  
Associate Professor Matthew Countryman  
Professor Laurent Dubois, Duke University  
Associate Professor Jesse-Hoffnung-Garskof  
Lecturer Julius Scott III**

**To Manmi, Granni, Nanan, Papi, Mina, my nephews, Wanda, Bart, Peterson, and last, yet  
never least, God.**

## Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
List of Abbreviations	iv
List of Figures	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One The Twilight of Popular Revolutions: The Suppression of Peasant Resistance during the U.S. Occupation in Haiti (1804-1934)	16
Chapter Two Disempowered Peasants, the Police State, National Ideology, and the Rise of François Duvalier (1921-1962)	70
Chapter Three Making Peasants <i>Chèf</i> : the <i>Tonton Makouts</i> Militia, Counter-Military Politics, and the Moral Grammar of Terror (1960-1971)	108
Chapter Four The Revitalized Haitian Military and Its Violent Conflict with the <i>Makout</i> Militia during the Rule of Jean-Claude Duvalier	150
Chapter Five Building Roads to Democratic Revolution: Utilizing Development Projects to Curb <i>Tonton Makouts</i> and the Origins of Collective Political Protest (1966-1986)	170
Bibliography	218

### **List of Abbreviations**

ANH: Archives Nationales Haïti

AFSC: American Friends Service Community

CNG: Conseil National de Gouvernement

DASM: District Agricole de Saint Marc, Artibonite

DGI: Direction Générale des Impôts

GTA: Gwoupman Tèt Ansanm

HMDC: Haitian Military Documents Collections

NARA: National Archives and Records Administration

NYPL: New York Public Library

SCRBC: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

PKNMD: Premye Kongre Nasyonal Mouvman Demokratik Yo

TP: Tribunal de Paix

VSN: Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale



## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. The Young Jean Price-Mars.....	32
Figure 2. Caco Rifle.....	67
Figure 3. <i>Chef de section</i> .....	83
Figure 4. Militia Identification Card.....	163
Figure 5. Roadwork by Community Councils in Northwest.....	170
Figure 6. Comic of Militia and Council (1).....	187
Figure 7. Comic of Militia and Council (2).....	188
Figure 8. Comic of Militia and Council (3).....	189

## Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the social and political history of Haitian peasants and the formation of the brutally repressive Duvalier dictatorship. It establishes that the rise of the dictatorship was the result of a political trajectory shaped by historical processes. In post-emancipated Haiti during the nineteenth century, thousands of peasants, who were formerly enslaved, joined the military and participated in insurrections to achieve high status and social mobility. These traditions of militarism and popular revolt also undermined the state's monopoly over force and checked its authoritarian tendencies. However, these militaristic traditions were curtailed and stamped out by US intervention (1915-1934). U.S. forces employed tactics of disarmament and imposed a repressive penal system that disempowered Haitian peasants.

This dissertation argues that decades of peasant marginalization from power eventually led to the rise of the Duvalier dictatorship in the twentieth century. After coming to power in 1957, François Duvalier remilitarized and rearmed peasants in exchange for their loyalty. This study shows how the dictator Duvalier, in particular, created a civil militia infamously known as the *tonton makouts* whose members formed the arm of state repression. Thousands of previously ostracized peasants enlisted into the dreaded *makout* militia to access status and political power. The support of an armed peasantry helped Duvalier repress the political opposition, allowing the regime to stay in power for almost three decades. In the same breath, this dissertation reveals that

experience in the militia and the regime's peasant councils politicized peasants over time. After being politicized, peasants participated in a major popular revolt in 1986 that was the first since the U.S. invasion. The popular revolt, which paradoxically included many *makouts*, led to the overthrow of the Duvalier regime and eventually to the truly democratic elected presidency of Jean- Bertrand Aristide.

## Introduction

*Abitan pa vle plante—abitan  
Tout abitan nan politik,—abitan  
Si yo pa plante, Pòtopwens pap manje,  
Si yo pa plante, moun lavil pap manje*

Peasant doesn't want to farm—peasant,  
All peasants are in politics—peasant,  
If they don't farm, Port-au-Prince won't eat  
If they don't farm, city people won't eat.

—The 1968 song "*Habitant*" by *l'Orchestre Tropicana d'Haiti*

During the brutal Duvalier years, the peasant Hermain Étienne lived and farmed in the southern Haitian coastal region of Grand Goâve. One day in 1963, Étienne was arrested by a local *chef de section* (rural police chief) and detained against his will in Grand Goâve's military barracks. The *chefs de section* and rural police formed the lowest rung of the national military that the U.S. installed years ago during its occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). In those days, U.S. forces established a military-rural police structure to suppress peasant traditions of popular insurrection. After the U.S. withdrew from Haiti, peasants continued to experience decades of violent repression, abuse, and arbitrary arrests at the hands of Haitian soldiers and police *chefs*. However, by the time of Étienne's arrest, the populist dictator François Duvalier was in power and his regime, though brutally repressive, espoused a pro-peasant ideology that promised

political equality and fair justice for ostracized peasants. Étienne took the regime's words seriously and sent a letter of complaint to the leading general of the Haitian army regarding his treatment by one of Grand Goâve's abusive *chefs*. The letter drew from Duvalier's pro-peasant populist discourse to compel the regime to keep up with its words.

"You know better than I that the *Duvalieriste* Revolution was made in the Interest of the mass peasantry," wrote Étienne. He went on, "this revolution continues and will continue until something good happens for the eternally crushed of the backcountry." Étienne was pointing out that police practices of abuse against peasants were antithetical to Duvalier's pro-peasant populism. And yet, "*Monsieur le Général voila*, how peasants of this place are treated." Étienne demanded, "an inquiry made to make Justice to whom Justice is due." Étienne's request for justice was delayed. Yet after various peasants from Goâve made other complaints to military headquarters, the local *chef de section* was eventually discharged from the rural police.<sup>1</sup>

Étienne's letter in many ways contradicts the predominant view in scholarship that has imagined peasants as a class that steered clear of politics in fear of brutal repression under the Duvalier regime. For far too long, the Duvalier regime and Haiti have been racialized and exoticized in ways that portray the period as a moment in which an extraordinarily autocratic black government ruled over nonpolitical, non-literate, passive, and poor black subjects. Richard Turits, a historian of the Caribbean, points out, "such depictions, however, suspiciously reproduce a long European tradition of projecting the most extreme forms of political despotism and otherness onto non-Western societies and imagining beyond the edges of the European universe passive or irrational peoples who mysteriously accept intolerable regimes."<sup>2</sup> Instead,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Cultivateur Duvalieriste* Hermain Étienne to Chef d'Etat Major, 28 August 1963 in the police dossier of Rinvil

<sup>2</sup> Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in the Dominican History* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 4.

Étienne's passionate letter captures the political literacy and volition of peasants striving to turn Duvalier's pro-peasant ideas into reality. Previously pushed to the margins of power by the U.S. occupation, by its native forces, and by subsequent Haitian governments, Étienne (who signed the letter as a "*Duvalieriste* cultivator") and other peasants supported the Duvalier regime with the expectation that they would be finally reintegrated into national politics. Indeed, the Duvalier government would carry out various populist programs to win the hearts and minds of the rural masses. Duvalier's populist project, however, eventually placed peasants in a morally ambiguous position that required them to violently defend the regime from political attacks in exchange for the recognition of their rights and access to political power.

Duvalier's most significant populist project included the creation of a violent militia infamously known as the *tonton makouts*. This dissertation reveals that Duvalier recruited mainly from the ostracized peasant classes to organize his dreaded *makout* militia. Peasants who joined were not paid for their services and, therefore, enlistment was on a voluntary basis. Hence, the militia was officially christened *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* or Volunteers of National Security (VSN). Without offering any monetary rewards, Duvalier expected the militia to protect the position of the regime. In return, the Duvalier government recognized the rights and political privileges of its *makout* members.

Many ostracized peasants became *makouts* or regime loyalists to renegotiate their disempowered status. After experiencing decades of political marginalization, many became attracted to the *makout* militia as a means to achieve self-realization in the Duvalier years. "Perhaps the most significant result of Duvalier's revolution," observed the historian David Nicholls, "will turn out to be the sense which was given to the mass of the peasants that they were really citizens and that what they did was important." He continued, "If people are told

often enough that they are important, they may begin to believe it."<sup>3</sup> Many peasants bought into the promises of the regime and joined the *makout* militia to defend their individual and communal interests. Peasants formed the bulk of Duvalier's unpaid militia; they were what Michel-Rolph Trouillot referred to as "a consenting army of volunteers...because for the first time they were becoming citizens—acknowledged members of the nation."<sup>4</sup> Thus, peasant motives for becoming a dreaded *makout* were tied to achieving self-determination in an oppressive and undemocratic political system. However, state practices of denying political recognition to peasants and violating their sense of rights did not begin with Duvalier. Rather, persistent forms of undemocratic practices emerged out of U.S intervention.

This dissertation argues that less flexible forms of authoritarian governance, contrary to conventional wisdom, were not historically intrinsic to political practice in early Haitian history. Instead, nineteenth-century Haiti was revolutionary and egalitarian because of its martial culture. In the colonial period, Africans were enslaved and forcibly brought to the French colony of Saint Domingue to labor on coffee, indigo, and sugar plantations. In 1791, these enslaved Africans launched what came to be known as the Haitian Revolution that culminated in emancipation and national independence. Even though early Haitian leaders betrayed the aspirations of the freed masses by passing laws such as *vagabondage* (vagrancy) and *corvée* that compelled them back to plantation labor, this dissertation reveals a portrait of everyday life in nineteenth-century Haiti where recurring popular revolts prevented the enforcement of these post-emancipation laws bent on reviving the plantation economy devastated by the Haitian Revolution. To be sure, Haitian

---

<sup>3</sup> David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 237. Elsewhere, however, Nicholls has asserted quite the contrary.

<sup>4</sup> Trouillot distinguishes the militia from the Tonton Makouts. He writes, "the Haitian language distinguishes between a *tonton makout*, a member of the secret police, and a *milisyen*, a member of the civil militia." See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation: Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 189-190.

law remained undemocratic during the era of revolutions. Some scholars have mistakenly interpreted these laws to prove that the Haitian masses went from “revolutionary slaves to powerless citizens.”<sup>5</sup> However, Haitian laws reflected state visions rather than practice. In reality, everyday life in nineteenth-century Haiti included recurring popular revolts that prevented the enforcement of post-emancipation laws and checked the authoritarian tendencies of the Haitian state.

Indeed, the rural population was well armed and participated in uprisings that kept a predatory and undemocratic Haitian state at bay. In fact, political rights and self-determination were expressed through the popular use of guns, swords, and machetes. “Constitution is paper, bayonet is iron” went one nineteenth-century Haitian proverb. In *Haiti: The Aftershock of History*, the historian Laurent Dubois shows that more Haitians were armed and in the military than there were registered voters.<sup>6</sup> Avoiding institutional means of power that already excluded them, many peasants preferred to carry iron—that is, the means to actual power. But all that would change in the twentieth century. In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson ordered the U.S. Marines to invade Haiti and suppress traditions of peasant insurrections. U.S. forces also imposed coercive methods of control that sowed into Haitian political culture the sinews of authoritarianism. And the way that U.S. forces imposed control eerily resembled the treatment of blacks in the post-emancipated US South.

The dissertation shows how the U.S. occupation drew on domestic practices of anti-black racial repression to suppress traditions of armed insurgency in Haiti. The occupation was

---

<sup>5</sup> See, Alex Dupuy, *Revolutionary Slaves to Powerless Citizens: Essays on the Politics and Economics of Underdevelopment, 1804-2013* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> By 1867, out of a population of 700,000 people, 20,000 were enlisted in the national army—and these numbers do not even include unofficial armed groups. Registered voters roughly numbered a meager nine hundred by 1870. See, Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershock of History*, New York: Metropolitan Books (2012), 170.



led by Colonel Littleton W.T. Waller who was born into a Tidewater Virginian slave-owning family and was a former corporal of the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues militia, which possibly oversaw racial violence in Virginia from the end of Reconstruction to the beginning of Jim Crow. Groomed in a southern society that viewed free black mobility as detrimental to the plantation economy and political stability, Waller was charged with suppressing traditions of insurrections that led him to confront the legacies of the Haitian Revolution. And he did so with domestic views in mind that disdained the idea of armed black people. Regarding Haitians, Waller once remarked, “you can never trust a nigger with a gun.”<sup>7</sup> He imagined that Haiti had many of them.

So, Waller carried out a program of social control that made Haiti look like the Jim Crow South. He ordered the creation of a native centralized constabulary force and prisons throughout the countryside. Under Waller, these forces enforced previously dormant post-emancipated laws such as vagrancy and *corvée* to extract involuntary labor from peasants and coerce them to build more prisons and labor camps. U.S.-created prisons and camps detained thousands of insurgents and ordinary peasants who were transformed into convict laborers in chain gangs that were sometimes leased out. These U.S. measures functioned to control the population and hold still a rebellious society. Previously free, Haitian peasants under U.S. occupation now shared the experience of racial repression and restricted mobility with other freed African-descended people in the Black Atlantic.

After the withdrawal of U.S. troops and in the post-invasion period (1934-1957), peasants continued to endure decades of imprisonment by the rural police who functioned under the authority of the national military – a direct predecessor of the U.S. created constabulary force. In

---

<sup>7</sup> Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 103.

the same breath, the post-invasion era also produced an African-based consciousness and pro-peasant ideologies that swept the nation. As a young intellectual during the occupation period, François Duvalier was inspired by these ideologies that later became the basis of his regime's populism and gave him the idea to rearm and remilitarize the rural population in exchange for their loyalty. These peasants, as we shall see, formed the bulk of Duvalier's infamous and dreaded *tonton makouts* but was a perverse solution to the problem of freedom reinvigorated by the U.S. invasion.<sup>8</sup> This dissertation is an examination of how the formation of the brutally repressive Duvalier dictatorship was a response to a post-emancipation crisis reinvigorated by U.S. intervention. In reality, the regime also relied on the militia for its own designs.

François Duvalier and subsequently his son Jean-Claude deployed the militia to curb the powers of the U.S. backed Haitian military and to violently repress political opposition during their respective rule between 1957 and 1986. With the help of the militia, the Duvalier regime consolidated political power and governed brutally for almost three decades. Traumatized by state terror, the Haitian populace secretly gave the militia its notorious name: *tonton makout*. The term refers to a straw-sack carrying old peasant man in rural legend that abducted wayward children from unsuspecting parents – a fitting name given that some Haitians heard of the peasant militia whisking away friends, relatives, and neighbors that were never seen again. *Tonton makout* tactics of terror made the Duvalier dictatorship one of the most repressive in Caribbean history.

Until now, there has been no extensive or empirically based historical analysis of the *tonton makout* militia. I spent eighteen months traveling throughout the ruggedly mountainous and underdeveloped Haitian countryside in search of rare primary sources located in local state

---

<sup>8</sup> In his study on Jamaica, the historian Thomas Holt refers to the practice of post-emancipated societies curbing the freedoms of freed people of African descent as the "problem of freedom." See Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*.

bureaus. Upon arriving at faraway destinations, I often confronted the reality that many primary materials were nonexistent or disfigured passed the point of legibility. Still, after attempting to visit as many local institutions in each geographical zone as traveling would permit, I collected—often by piecemeal fashion—thousands of police reports, court proceedings, government correspondences, and even peasant letters to the state that were fortunately preserved. These primary materials illuminate the obscure local activities of *tonton makouts* in the Duvalier years.

I also hiked up mountains and interrupted peasants laboring in their small gardens from sunup to sundown so that they could share memories that some spoke nostalgically about, while others wanted to forget. Nevertheless, listening to their complicated peasant memories added more nuanced dimensions as to how scholars have conceived of state-peasant relations during the Duvalier period. Traveling throughout the far reaches of the Haitian countryside, I created a dense evidentiary base that comprises oral histories and rural archival materials. These archival materials have never been utilized in prior studies of Haitian history because many scholars believed that they did not exist. Oral histories by rural denizens have never been collected before because scholars assumed that peasants were apolitical and marginalized from national politics in the Duvalier years. They have asserted, without much evidence, that the Duvalier regime dispatched small groups of makouts to suppress a nation largely comprising peasants.<sup>9</sup> Nicholls sneered at such claims, “Accounts of Haiti under Duvalier as a country in which five million ignorant discontented and rebellious were forcibly held down by a handful of ‘cutthroats’ are the

---

<sup>9</sup> For example, Mats Lundahl wrote, “under the Duvaliers...peasants continued to be removed from political life, living in comparative isolation.” Mats Lundahl, *Peasants and Poverty: A Study of Haiti* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 350. Robert L. Rotberg problematically states, “This attitude, if it may truly be attributed to the majority of Haitians—and whether it is termed an intelligent learned response (a laboratory rat avoids pressing the levers which produce shocks), a system-inducing coping mechanisms, submissiveness reminiscent of slavery, apathy produced by nutritional deficiencies, or sheer political atrophy—helps explain why Duvalier has survived so long...” Robert L. Rotberg, *Haiti: The Politics of Squalor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 365.

product of wishful thinking and bed-time reading rather than the conclusion of careful academic research.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the research findings of this dissertation reveal that *makouts* were not small bands of “cutthroats” holding the nation hostage. Instead, oral sources reveal the dimensions of the *tonton makouts* as a vast paramilitary body that attracted tens of thousands of peasants with the promise of political recognition, prestige, and mobility. In the era of the makouts, as the peasant Adonat Touchard mentioned in an oral interview, “everyone was *chef* then” (*tout moun te chèf*).<sup>11</sup> This dissertation is a reinterpretation of the Duvalier regime and makouts that divulges an unconventional story of complicity which is the result of my archival trails and oral voices.

These primary sources also illuminate complexities of how *makouts* activities drove the power of the regime in opposing directions that simultaneously sustained and disrupted government control. On the one hand, *makouts* formed a type of social base that helped provide “consent” to the regime as well as repression for it. On the other hand, makouts were involved in anti-state activities that protected peasants from rapacious armed tax collectors, elite groups, and abusive rural police agents. The social scientist Elizabeth J. Perry tells us, “militias have been touted as instruments of state-breaking and implements of state making.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, *makouts* operated at odds with the Duvalier regime and, ultimately, they helped topple it.

By the mid 1960s, the Duvalier regime began to move against independent militia activities. Most importantly, the regime appropriated ideas of community organization from foreign development policymakers and installed grassroots “community councils” throughout the nation to reorient peasants away from independent forms of *makout* violence. The regime

---

<sup>10</sup> Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 215.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Adonat Touchard in Torbeck, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth J. Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution, Worker Militias, Citizenship, and the Modern Chinese State* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 6.

organized peasant councils to provide labor in development projects in exchange for foreign food dumping. In addition, peasant councils mobilized their rural communities to solve local problems. After Duvalier died in 1971, his son Jean-Claude became president and continued with the policy of trying to transfer *makouts* into the more benign peasant councils as a way to curb the militia's independent activities. Under Jean-Claude, there were also growing signs of rapprochement between the regime and the national military.

Jean-Claude actually revived government support for the demoralized national army whose hierarchies previously underwent frequent purges and reorganization during his father's rule. However, Jean-Claude revitalized the national army while publicly denouncing *makouts* actions. State department cables disclose that the U.S. government offered to resume support for the regime on conditions that the regime privileged the national army over the *makout* militia. This realignment of power structures, banishing *makouts* to the status of voluntary peasant laborers and reviving the vigor of the once defunct U.S. backed military, led to the regime's downfall.

Initially, peasant councils along with *makouts* followed the conservative politics of the regime, but they eventually began to mobilize against the Duvalier state. The regime intended to transfer peasant support away from *makouts* and into the more benign councils. Instead, *makouts* and councils fused into a political movement that overthrew the regime. In sum, this dissertation analyzes how the Duvalier regime created the *makouts* to defend its interests, but how the militia eventually overthrew the regime. Once again, Nicholls keenly observed, "the unintended effects of these projects may turn out to be more radical than their patrons have calculated."<sup>13</sup> These

---

<sup>13</sup> Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 246.

groups finally put their heads together (one peasant council actually morphed into an activist group called *Tèt Ansanm*) and in 1986, rose up against the regime and overthrew it.

Other scholars assert that economic crises and ill advised policies of the 1980s sparked this democratic movement, popularly referred to as the *dechoukaj* (uprooting). Some of these policies included a vast state-sponsored campaign that eliminated the native porcine population (the creole pig) that consequently devastated the peasant economy. However, the reason why the campaign was so systematic was partially because peasants and peasant-based organizations were lured by the regime to carry out the porcine elimination plan. In other words, peasants were themselves the tentacles of the state that eliminated pigs.

The peasant Lemanoit “Zo” Pierre of Lacoma, who was a member of the councils and activist group *Tèt Ansanm*, attempted to explain, “the Duvalier regime plotted with the U.S. government to kill the creole pigs... They killed many pigs.” Also participating in the interview, another peasant interjected, “But we Haitians are a bunch of assassins, everyone accepted (the pig elimination program). It was the owners that turned in their pigs.” A disagreement soon followed. Zo returned, “they accepted but what were they supposed to do when the state passed its laws, the parliament signed the law. In those times there was no democracy; it was the *makouts* that were in charge. Do you think we could say anything to them?”<sup>14</sup> This debate reveals the complexities of coercion and consent that were tied the pig elimination program and the hegemony of the regime. But peasants, including Zo, were part of the regime’s state-sponsored organizations that responded to the regime's realignment and subsequently overthrew it. The political scientist Theda Skocpol asserts that what makes peasants revolutionary “has not only grown out of capitalist agrarian commercialization. Such revolutions have emerged more

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Lemanoit “Zo” Pierre and another unnamed peasant, 27 November 2013, Lacoma, Jean Rabel.

invariably out of occasionally favorable political situations, shaped in large part by the interstate dynamics of the modern world-capitalist era."<sup>15</sup>

The 1986 peasant uprising that unseated the Duvalier regime led to democracy in Haiti, but the U.S. backed military disrupted the process. Grassroots peasant organizations, which were rooted in the peasant councils and *makouts*, led the way in pushing for democratic representation in post-Duvalier period. Finally, in 1991, the leftist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was democratically elected as president. However, the national military, which was secretly supported by the C.I.A., led a coup against Aristide and violently suppressed the grassroots organizations in the countryside. When Aristide returned to power years later, the democratic movement in Haiti was subdued. Yet, as a signal to the efforts of past movements, Aristide finally abolished the U.S. created military and rural police.

Finally, it is worth mentioning a striking irony regarding the short-lived popular democracy of the post-Duvalier period; it spawned out of the regime's repressive designs to organize the peasant masses into an armed citizenry for its own purposes. And yet peasants and *makouts* were behind the regime's downfall. This should not be surprising given the nature of the tense relationship between armed citizens and governments. Though often depicted as "thugs" and "cutthroats" in the literature, the creation of the *makouts* and their anti-state activities were the byproduct of modern state practice. Perry observes, "the concept of an armed citizenry, whether justified as an instrument of state power (à la Machiavelli), as a vehicle of class revolution (à la Marx and Lenin), or as guarantee against tyranny (à la Jefferson) has occupied a central place in modern political theory." But she reminds us, "The practical consequences of these conceptions, however, have often strayed far from the ideals of their

---

<sup>15</sup> Theda Skocpol, "Review: What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?" *Comparative Politics* 14 (1982): 373.

proponents.”<sup>16</sup> If not entirely absorbed into the mechanisms of power to be completely disciplined, armed citizens have always been dangerous to governments and ultimately proved to be so in the case of the Duvalier regime.

---

<sup>16</sup> Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution*, 16.



## Chapter One

### **The Twilight of Popular Revolutions: The Suppression of Peasant Resistance during U.S. Occupation in Haiti (1804-1934)**

“My officers and soldiers...are fighting a thief, a traitor, a convict, a renegade who wants to give up our customhouse to the Americans,” the rebel leader Dr. Rosalvo Bobo wrote to his armed followers camped in Vallières, months before the U.S. invasion. Bobo's letter warned that "this thief" – Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam – negotiated a deal to grant the United States control over Haiti's customs houses – and thus over its main revenue.<sup>1</sup> In his efforts to overthrow and replace the president, Bobo rallied rebel soldiers and armed peasants that belonged to a northern organized insurgent group called *caco*<sup>2</sup> that often toppled governments. Thus, Bobo hoped to mobilize a *caco* revolt by which reconnaissance, money, arms, and ammunitions were secretly circulated across the north and among rural men plotting to remove the sitting president.

However, rival forms of popular uprisings surpassed Bobo's rebellion. On July 28, upon hearing news that 162 political prisoners were executed under the president's order, a spontaneous street mob chased President Guillaume Sam around the capital and into the French

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosalvo Bobo to Baez Bernard, 28 May 1915, Box 5, Bobo letters in folder Caco Correspondence, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>2</sup> Historians argue that the word *caco* derived from the name of a fierce bird called *Taco* in Haitian Kréyòl. *Caco* in Spanish and Latin means "thief." Given that *caco* insurgents operated near the Dominican border, the label may also have a Spanish etymology. In Hinche, a town near the Dominican border, the term still means "thief." Interview with Bazelais Jean Baptiste, March 2010.

embassy where he fell victim to popular justice. "It has reached me that Vilbrun Guillaume was killed in Port-au-Prince. I have written for confirmation on the news," wrote a surprised Bobo to his *caco* followers a day after the president's death.<sup>3</sup> The execution of a Haitian president by a spontaneous mob indicated that popular insurrections were overwhelming the Haitian state, splintering its monopoly over force. Even political elites affiliated with the insurgent culture, including Bobo who held degrees from Paris and London, could not control the whirlwind of popular uprisings and only hoped to capitalize on its results. Bobo desperately wrote to *cacos*, "spread the news... act without delay."<sup>4</sup> A power-losing elite was just one measure of how popular sovereignty prevailed in Haiti. This was the case because recurring popular uprisings convulsed the Haitian state and sometimes consumed political elites that included President Guillaume Sam. But on the day of the president's death, the United States Marines invaded and occupied Haiti not only to squelch Bobo's political ambitions, but also to suppress egalitarian traditions of popular revolts that was rooted in the legacies of the Haitian Revolution.

The U.S. built and led a native constabulary force that disarmed and demobilized the rural population. Without their weapons and insurgent culture of mobilization, peasants became vulnerable to state repression that continued after U.S. troops withdrew from Haiti. Although scholarship overemphasizes the role of a U.S.-created army sustaining authoritarianism in Caribbean countries, this chapter rather suggests that the process of disempowering the population was also significant to the consolidation of state power and authoritarianism in Haiti. In other words, U.S. intervention and its native army liberated the Haitian state and political

---

<sup>3</sup> Rosalvo Bobo to General Octavien Pierre and Baptiste Renair, 29 July 1915, Box 5, Bobo letters in folder Caco Correspondence, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

elites from the constraints placed upon them by popular uprisings. The suppression of armed popular sovereignty was a function of making authoritarianism in Haiti during the occupation.

Before the U.S. invasion, Haiti was a revolutionary nation where former enslaved Africans and their descendants revolted to protect their ideas of freedom. The nation of Haiti emerged out of the ashes of a successful slave revolution and experienced, thereafter, recurring popular revolts throughout its nineteenth century existence. “When a country has secured its liberation by armed struggle,” the historian David Nicholls remarked about early Haiti, “a tradition of violence frequently persists into the independence period.”<sup>5</sup> Between 1791-1804, enslaved people of African descent rose up and led a transformative revolt in the French colony of Saint Domingue that culminated in emancipation and in national independence. Now free from slavery and colonialism, rebel leaders named their independent nation, Haiti, which was the island’s original designation given to the land by its decimated indigenous inhabitants. Thus, the war of independence and the naming of Haiti were revolutionary acts of freedom and redemption for those brutalized by European colonization and enslavement. And the traditions of revolt continued into the independence period.

Even when early Haitian leaders attempted to pass laws such as *vagabondage* (vagrancy) and *corvée* that compelled the freed population back to harsh plantation labor, the freed population participated in popular revolts that weakened the state and thwarted elite visions to restore a plantation economy based on involuntary labor. In a twist of fate, the revolutionary wars of the nineteenth century helped former enslaved Africans and their descendants build a peasant society that countered the plantation model envisioned by Haitian elites. And finally, by the late nineteenth century, elites conceded to small farming as the prevailing form of economic

---

<sup>5</sup> David Nicholls, *Haiti in the Caribbean Context: Ethnicity, Economy, and Revolt* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 170.

production established by popular insurrections. Put simply, the freed masses succeeded over time in planting their aspirations.

Drawing upon historical materials at the Haitian National Archives that have never been utilized in a study until now, we can see how elites changed their tune about independent farming labor. On 1 May 1888 during national holiday of Agriculture Day, for example, the Torbeck magistrate declared to peasants that they were “dignified citizen cultivators” who should continue “to give yourself courage to the cultivation of the land of your fortune and... definitely the object of the abolition of slavery.”<sup>6</sup> In the northern region of Pilate, the local magistrate chose to celebrate Agriculture Day by crowning peasants Linpha Telfort, Oslin Ratis, Asilien Jean, Dosous Louis, Presimé Bastien, Botexte Fils, Lexandre Jean, and Metellus Hisidor for their exceptional hard work as independent small farmers.<sup>7</sup> Imagine, the previously outlawed practice of small farming was now worth a crown! This was the free world that revolutions and revolts made in nineteenth-century Haiti and was itself an unprecedented feat in the Black Atlantic.

Perhaps the African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois, who was also of Haitian descent, had this in mind when he asserted that Haiti was inhabited by “the happiest and most contented peasantry in the world, after raising...from a veritable hell of slavery.”<sup>8</sup> To be sure, as this chapter will demonstrate, an armed society was not without problems. Peasants complained about vigilantism, banditry, and other forms of popular violence that were linked to an armed and insurrectional society. Du Bois still had a point though maybe beyond his civic taste. Indeed, Haiti was dangerously egalitarian, but peasants enjoyed the freedom of mobility and independent labor.

---

<sup>6</sup> Le Magistrat Communal de Torbeck to Secrétaire l'État, l'Intérieur, 7 May 1888, in folder 13235, *Archives Nationales d'Haiti*, Port-au-Prince.

<sup>7</sup> Pilate, *Le Conseil Communal de cette Commune* to Secrétaire l'État, l'Intérieur, 13236, ANH, PauP

<sup>8</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, *The Negro* (New York: Cosmo Inc., 2010 but originally published in 1915), 106.

Meanwhile, other people of African descent all across the Americas were repressed by post-emancipation laws bent on denying them freedom. In post-emancipated Cuba,<sup>9</sup> Brazil, Jamaica, and the United States, African-descended people were menaced by vagrancy laws, jailing, or harsh police tactics that served to limit their mobility and reattach them to plantation labor.<sup>10</sup> In nineteenth-century Haiti, on the other hand, traditions of popular revolt arguably fostered one of the freest post-emancipated societies (including the neighboring Dominican Republic) for black peasants. But all would change in the twentieth century during U.S. intervention. In 1915, hours after President Guillaume Sam was violently deposed and murdered by popular revolt, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson ordered the U.S. Marines to occupy Haiti and suppress popular traditions of insurrections. U.S. forces would impose coercive methods of control that sowed into Haitian political culture the sinews of unrestricted authoritarianism. And

---

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Scott discusses vagrancy in her book on Cuban slave and post-emancipation society. She shows us that Cuban planters contemplated employing vagrancy laws to compel former Afro-Cubans back to plantation labor. However, she shows us, "In the end, no comprehensive plan for the repression of vagrancy was developed." This still shows us that vagrancy, as the preferred law to control black labor, was part of a global trend in post-emancipated societies. Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Pennsylvania: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 219-222.

<sup>10</sup> All across the Atlantic, post-emancipated laws restricted black mobility through the enforcement of vagrancy laws and incarceration. Scholars on the African American studies have been pushing the field of history to consider incarceration as the replacement of slavery. See, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). On U.S. South vagrancy, see David Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996), 21-33, and 74-78. On a comprehensive study on convict leasing of African American women in the south, see Talitha L. Leflouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina University Press, 2015). The topic of vagrancy law as a legal tool to restrict the mobility and independence of freed blacks has also been covered in some studies on the Caribbean and Latin America. On Brazil, see Martha Knisely Huggins, *From Slavery to Vagrancy in Brazil: Crime and Social Control in the Third World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984). On Cuba, see the above note. On vagrancy in post-emancipated Jamaica, see Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992), 218. African-descended people in the Dominican Republic experienced freedom equivalent to Haitians in the nineteenth century. However when the U.S. invaded in 1916, vagrancy laws were promulgated in the Dominican Republic "but it was strictly enforced for the first time [years later] by the Trujillo state." See Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in the Dominican History* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 92-93.

they did so by utilizing penal forms of control in Haiti that eerily resembled the treatment of blacks in the post-emancipated U.S. South.

As the U.S. occupation was underway in Haiti, African Americans living in the United States were disproportionately arrested at high rates; starting in the late nineteenth-century blacks constituted 30% of the prison population, while only making up 12% of the general population.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. legal system enforced minor laws such as vagrancy to target African Americans for arrest and, when convicted, forced them to perform unfree labor. Discriminately jailing blacks (alongside racial segregation) was a practice of U.S. racism or what we have come to know as Jim Crow. These racialized practices of control were likely incorporated into U.S. imperial projects in the Pacific and Caribbean and functioned as tools to discipline and control occupied subject populations of non-European descent.

Drawing upon never-before-used legal records hidden in small courts scattered throughout the Haitian countryside and combining them with rare military reports from the U.S. National Archives, this essay demonstrates how U.S. intervention in Haiti actually looked like the penal side of U.S. Jim Crow. Beginning in 1916, after seizing constitutional control and handpicking the Haitian president, U.S. forces decreed the creation of a centralized constabulary force and the construction of prisons throughout the countryside. These U.S.-led forces revived the practice of enforcing previously dormant post-emancipated laws such as *vagabondage* (vagrancy) and *corvée* to extract involuntary labor from Haitian peasants, coercing them to build more prisons and labor camps. U.S.-created prisons and prison camps that detained thousands of insurgents and ordinary peasants who were transformed into convict laborers in chain gangs. Similarly to the racist practices in the U.S., some Haitian peasants performed labor on prison

---

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 3-4.

farms. U.S. intervention, thus, amounted to post-emancipation crisis that peasants spent the previous century fighting off.

Under occupation, however, many peasants were getting locked up in the same fashion as blacks in the U.S. – so much so that rumors were generated among the U.S. public that Washington deliberately recruited southern soldiers to impose a Jim Crow-style government in Haiti. Cries of "slavery in Haiti" circulated in the U.S. press.<sup>12</sup> Not necessarily hyperbole, the invocation of slavery in the U.S. press was meant to point out that the occupation resembled the post-emancipation crisis in the U.S. South. Instead of allowing U.S. blacks to be freely mobile and select their own forms of labor after emancipation, southern states enacted and enforced laws that criminalized these freedoms. The U.S. press witnessed the same phenomenon in occupied Haiti that conjured up in their minds the horrors of slavery and its afterlife.

Haitian peasants felt the same way. U.S. repressive measures reminded many Haitians of enslavement. After defeating French colonialism and slavery to live a life of freedom, Haitians were once more confronted with a colonial power led by the U.S. that sought to impose unfree labor and racial repression. Facing these atrocities, over forty thousand Haitians fled the country, while many others turned to traditions of armed resistance to fight back. During later Senate hearings, U.S. officers testified that “bandits” numbered 2,000 strong, but newly discovered U.S. intelligence reports divulge that close to one hundred thousand peasants actually surrendered. Ultimately, U.S. soldiers violently put down the armed struggle and continued with practices of forced labor and jailing as methods of social control, which, in turn, disarmed peasants and eliminated rural traditions of organized insurgencies that had previously checked state power.

---

<sup>12</sup> Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 111.

In the remaking of authoritarianism in occupied Haiti, the role the U.S. played in weakening popular sovereignty was as equally important to building a native army beholden to the central government and U.S. interest. Yet much scholarly attention has been given to the army as the main component of authoritarianism, while ignoring the process of popular disarmament as also a function of making authoritarianism. As this chapter will show, however, the population previously played a major role in restraining the authoritarian tendencies of the Haitian state. But U.S. invasion liberated the state from the menace of popular sovereignty. Thus, twentieth-century Haitian authoritarianism was the result of U.S. intervention that employed post-emancipated methods of control to eliminate traditions of popular resistance. And these defiant traditions were rooted in the legacies of Haitian Revolution.

### ***A Nation of Peasant Generals***

Throughout the nineteenth century, revolutionary wars in Haiti forged a militaristic society where insurrections checked state power and created pathways to freedom and status. The origins of popular rebellion date back to the 1791-1804 Haitian Revolution during which enslaved Africans successfully revolted and achieved emancipation and independence from France. Haiti was the first black republic in the Atlantic and the first nation in the world to be the result of slave revolt. The Haitian Revolution not only produced an exceptional case of black national sovereignty, but also a special situation in which a cadre of Haitian generals, who were formerly enslaved, governed a freed population accustomed to fighting for freedom.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Haiti's first two heads of state, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe, were formerly enslaved but became generals during the Haitian Revolution. The path from slave to

---

<sup>13</sup> Johnhenry Gonzalez, "Defiant Haiti: Free-Soil Runaways, Ship Seizures and the Politics of Diplomatic Non-Recognition in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post Slave Studies* 36, no. 1 (2014): 3-4.



general eventually became the aspiration of the masses in a society born out of wide-scale revolutionary war. Decades later, thousands upon thousands of Haitians would claim the status of general. Yet in the early period of independence, only a selected few were generals. And initially, the freed masses looked for direction from these revolutionary generals who bestowed upon them dialectics of paternalistic affection and proto-forms of black consciousness.

Because they also experienced the system of slavery, many early leader-generals bemoaned how the freed masses previously suffered under the conditions of slavery. They often affectively referred to the masses as “*malheureux*” or unfortunate.<sup>14</sup> Leaders insisted that national independence would bring freedom to the *malheureux* who were largely people of African descent that were long identified as “*noire*” or “black” in the colonial period. In order to elevate the category of blackness from its previous colonial status as an indicator of racial inferiority that was once unworthy of citizenship in a modern nation, the first constitution in 1805 went a different route and decreed that Haitians would “henceforth only be known generically as blacks.”<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the category “black” was not racially exclusionary and, in fact, included people of mixed-race backgrounds and even whites that, after fighting on the side of enslaved rebels during the Haitian revolution, continued to reside in Haiti. Nonetheless, by making it law so that all citizens must be considered black, the early state was attempting to give political recognition to the freed black masses and assert that they, too, were worthy of citizenship in an Atlantic world that continued to mark black bodies as living commodities that should be merely driven to agonizing labor. Nonetheless, while espousing a discourse of paternalistic empathy and racial solidarity toward the freed population, many early leaders went

---

<sup>14</sup> Jean Alix René, “*Le Culte de l’égalité: Une Exploration du processus de formation de l’État et de la politique populaire en Haïti au cours de la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle, 1804-1846*” (PhD diss., University of Concordia), 53, 65, 72, and 82.

<sup>15</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 43.

against principles of freedom conceived by the masses and sought to employ forms of involuntary labor to rebuild the plantations that had been ruined by the revolutionary war. Put simply, Haitian leaders endeavored to revive the plantation economy with forced labor.

In so doing, Emperor Dessalines (1804-1806), King Christophe (1807-1820), and President Jean-Pierre Boyer (1818-1843) devised policies to divide Haitian society into mainly two halves: a military caste that benefited from plantation economy and *cultivateurs* who provided the bulk of labor. Generals became large landowners; low ranking soldiers policed plantations; and the non-military population was pushed into the status of *cultivateurs* or laborers forced to work on plantations owned by the military elite.<sup>16</sup> Although lamented as *malheureux*, the military elite saw the freed population as *cultivateurs* who performed plantation labor that eerily resembled their earlier colonial status as enslaved laborers. For example, *cultivateurs* were legally prohibited from leaving plantations to which they were assigned. If so, the so-called *malheureux* would be arrested, according to early Haitian laws, as vagrants – “*sans aveu*” or “*divagants*” under the rule of Dessalines and Christophe; and as “*vagabond*” under Boyer.<sup>17</sup> However, elite attempts to stratify society and enforce labor laws ultimately failed for two important reasons.

First, state labor policies had a gender problem that generated resistance. The Haitian Revolution had decimated the population in ways that left a larger proportion of women who survived the revolutionary war than men by the time of independence. Many of the remaining men were conscripted into the national army. Thus, a high number of women were forced into

---

<sup>16</sup> The first head of state and Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines decreed half of a plantation to lieutenants, one full plantation to captains, two plantations to battalion chiefs, three plantations to colonels, and five plantations to generals. See Jean Alix René, “*Le Culte de l’égalité: Une Exploration du processus de formation de l’État et de la politique populaire en Haïti au cours de la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle, 1804-1846*” (PhD diss., University of Concordia), 110.

<sup>17</sup> René, “*Le Culte de l’égalité*,” 103-104.

the status of *cultivateur*. One contemporary French traveler observed, "the men forming the lesser part, the land was generally cultivated by women." Some of these women tried to escape forced labor by deploying various strategies. Many attempted to enter the profession of marketing or *machann* (Fr: *marchande*) that disqualified them as *cultivateurs* and allowed them to escape plantations. Dessalines, however, passed a law in 20 January 1804 that required a license for commercial vendors making it difficult for women to mask themselves as market women as a way to escape the status of *cultivateur*. Other women attempted to marry themselves out of forced labor, but Dessalines and Christophe sent out directives to military officers discouraging them to wed women "*cultivatrice*" because conjugal acts of resistance released women from labor obligations. In 1805, Christophe, who was at that juncture a leading general in Dessalines's government, chastised an officer asking whether soldiers could marry women laborers, "Did you consider, *monsieur*, that if we permitted for soldiers...to marry plantation *cultivatrices* that would kill agriculture, and I am surprised that you asked me this."<sup>18</sup> But women laborers continued to strike up intimate relationships and form kin ties with soldiers and generals that disrupted the designs of political leaders to revive a plantation economy.

The second point to consider was the following: the early Haitian state devised a contradictory policy of nationwide conscription that militated against efforts to compel labor. Haitian leaders, in fear of European recolonization, continuously armed and conscripted the very tiny number of male *cultivateurs* it forced to labor.<sup>19</sup> The economist Mats Lundahl estimated that "between one-tenth of the male population and one-tenth of the total population" constituted

---

<sup>18</sup> Rene, 120 and 122.

<sup>19</sup> In 1818, for example, the Haitian government decreed that all male plantation laborers must be conscripted into the national guard, but eight years later enacted vagrancy laws to restrict the mobility of these laborers to plantations. René, "*Le Culte de l'égalité*", 103-104, and 122.

the national military under Dessalines' rule.<sup>20</sup> Militarizing society was good policy in terms of thwarting European designs to recolonize Haiti; in 1826 the British consul Charles Mackenzie admitted, "I am disposed to think that no invading European force can ever succeed in conquering Haiti."<sup>21</sup> However, the state's policy of arming *cultivateurs* and the population created an over-militarized male society that entrusted them to police the labor of their male and women kinfolk who were all pushed into the disadvantaged status of *cultivateurs*. These contradictions were the result of the Haitian state overlooking the reality of kin ties and solidarity as it scrambled to revive the plantation economy along gender lines. With only elite-based ideas of national duty in mind, the Haitian state commanded the army to ensure the function of plantation labor.

Yet for ordinary Haitians, nationalism was not merely the product of state declaration and discourse but also had a morally-based aspect that was forged by the experience of enslaved Africans fighting side-by-side in the Haitian Revolution for a common cause: their freedom. The Haitian state could not cut through this war-tested solidarity of their so-called *malheureux*. Rather, political leaders confronted unified forms of popular resistance from soldiers and *cultivateurs* alike. For example, soldiers, without authorization, brought non-militarized male *cultivateurs* into the army to avoid plantation work. In response, Christophe passed decrees that outlawed unauthorized enlistment of *cultivateurs* into the army that liberated them from forced work. But it was the Haitian state that originally created this dangerous precedent with its policies of mass conscription.

In no time, soldiers and laborers bonded together to run away and revolt. Christophe received a report on 30 January 1805 that showed how, rather than perform military duties which

---

<sup>20</sup> Mats Lundahl, *Peasants and Poverty: A Study of Haiti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 375.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholls cites Mackenzie's correspondence. Nicholls, *Haiti in the Caribbean Context*, 171 and 259 n16

included enforce vagrancy laws, “there is an infinity of soldiers and *cultivateurs* who found refuge in l’Isle de Mancenille, to remove [themselves] from service and work.” Mancenille was previously a hiding place for enslaved rebels during the Haitian Revolution. Under independence, Haitian soldiers were returning to slave hideouts to resist the Haitian state. Hiding in the northern chain of mountains between the regions of Dondon and Vallières, also a former slave hideaway, were “thirty deserted soldiers,” learned Christophe.<sup>22</sup> In the fall, Christophe was dealing with a soldier-*cultivateur* revolt in the mountains of Vallières. A century later peasant insurgents would continue to find refuge in Vallières – as peasant insurgents did during the popular rebellion that eventually led to the death of President Guillaume Sam and was followed by U.S. invasion. These traditions of organized popular revolt began in the Haitian Revolution, continued throughout the nineteenth century, and confronted twentieth-century U.S. imperialism during the occupation. U.S. forces would revive post-emancipated laws to combat popular traditions of revolt that, up until then, thwarted state plans of compelling labor. Before the U.S. invasion, however, peasants were successful in keeping the state at bay by taking over the military as an institution of national security and transforming it into an organization of popular insurgency.

The military became an autonomous umbrella network that organized soldiers and *cultivateurs* for uprisings against the state. Indeed, the lines between the special status of soldier and an armed *cultivateur* became blurred and armed insurrections continued to be the medium for achieving freedom during the independence period. Together, they embroiled themselves in the many insurrections and civil wars that erupted in the early period. These wars weakened the Haitian state and its hopes for reviving a plantation economy were never fully realized. Instead,

---

<sup>22</sup> René, “*Le Culte de l’égalité*,” 129-131.

over time, ordinary soldiers and *cultivateurs* moved towards self-sufficient small farming and participated in recurring revolutions to improve their political and economic status. Above all, arms and warfare would be associated with freedom that brought down governments seeking to revive the plantation economy and forced labor.

Dessalines, Christophe, and Boyer along with their post-emancipation plans had all succumbed to popular revolts comprising the admixture of soldiers and *cultivateurs*. However, President Alexandre Pétion, who remained the only early Haitian leader-general to live out his rule without losing power to popular revolts, declared in a speech, “May the weapons given to the people for them to defend their liberty be turned against my own breast if ever I conceive of the impious and audacious idea of attacking their rights.”<sup>23</sup> The guns of his followers never uprooted Pétion because he eventually pursued a policy of breaking up plantations and redistributing land to soldiers who constituted Haiti’s first official peasantry. While Dessalines was assassinated during a revolt and Christophe took his own life as rebels marched upon his palace, Pétion died peacefully in his sleep in 1818 after a long reign because he gave credence to what Haiti would become – a free nation of armed black peasants.

Leaving behind elite dreams of reviving the plantation economy based on forced labor, Haiti transmogrified into a peasant society in which rural men sought a career in farming and war against undemocratic governments to obtain status. To be sure, women also took part in revolts; during the insurrection against Boyer in the 1840s, women were reported to have “dragged two large cannons” into the battlefield and blasted away thirty soldiers.<sup>24</sup> However equally brave on the warpath, women were not legally allowed to join the military. Such gender restrictions made

---

<sup>23</sup> Dubois, 57.

<sup>24</sup> Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 181.

Haiti a martial society where only men would directly benefit materially from membership in the military and warfare. In fact, all Haitian men were soldiers and the law of the land prescribed them as so. "No person is worthy of being a Haitian who is not a good father, a good son, a good husband, and especially a good soldier," read an article in the first Haitian constitution.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, only non-conscripted soldiers enjoyed a set of privileges that initially included exemption from forced plantation labor but soldiers eventually expected military benefits.

As the plantation economy fell apart in the middle of the nineteenth-century, the status of non-conscripted soldiers became defined by access to military benefits that strengthened the economic and social standing of rural men enlisted in the military. Non-conscripted soldiers were promised salaries, land, free medical care, emergency financial assistance, and pensions.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Most of the soldiery, as was the case of Haitian society, comprised peasants including generals, noncommissioned officers, and the rank-and-file. By the mid nineteenth century, the military offered smallholding soldiers an opportunity to become mid-sized-owners. On early state land redistribution, see Gonzalez, "The War on Sugar," 134-136.

<sup>26</sup> Ongoing research shows that a large portion of state revenues went to the social welfare of its peasant soldiery. "The 1848 budget indicates that almost 65 percent of total government expenditures went to the army (almost ten times as much as to justice, education and public worship together), to which had to be added the funds for the police. The next year, the figure lay around 55 percent." Mats Lundahl, *Peasants and Poverty: A Study of Haiti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 377-379. In the 1840s, colonels were to receive a monthly payment of 100 gourdes; chefs de bataillon, 50gdes; Capitaines Adjutants-Majors, 32gdes; Capitaine Quartier-Maitre, 32gdes; Officier de santé de 3e classe, 20gdes; Capitaines, 32gdes; Lieutenants, 24gdes; Sous-Lieutenants, 18gdes; Adjutants-Sous-Officiers, 10gdes; Tambour et Fifre Majors, Sergent-Major de musique; Sergent-Major des compagnies, 8gdes; Tambour et Fifre Maitres, 6gdes; Fourriers, 5gdes; and Caporaux, 5gdes. Rank-and-file constituted the less fortunate: "Soldats, 4gdes and Fifres et Tambours, 4gdes." See, 25e Régiment d'infanterie, 27 March 1942, folder 13400, Guerre et Marine, ANH, PauP. As early as the Boyer period, sources reveal that the government was responsible for the medical care of its soldiery. On medical vouchers, see "*Etat Des Malades Existant ce jour à L'Hôpital Militaire de cette Ville*," 28 November 1828, folder 10884, Guerre et Marine; "*Feuille de revue de soldate du aux officiers, sous officiers et ouvriers du Génie militaire, D'après la revue passer ce jour*," 13 May 1849, folder 10694, Guerre et Marine, ANH, PauP. The state provided emergency assistance. Take for example how on 12 September 1871 when a general wrote a letter to military headquarters on behalf of the local commander of Cavallion. Evicted and lodged in a small-dilapidated office, the commander of Cavallion, in 1871 found two offers where he could stay "but the owners demand a price that he cannot pay without the aid of the Government." See, St. Jean Scifunion to Secretary State of the Department of War etc., 12 September 1871, 12926, Guerre et Marine, Archives Nationales Haiti (ANH), Port-au-Prince (PauP). By the late nineteenth century, we can see that soldiers still wrote to the department of war when they did not get these benefits. On 19 August 1886, ill soldier Jérôme Dupaux pleaded to consider "my state of sickness and make for me what demands *la justice et humanité*," wanting harder currency due to the fact that the medical doctor refused to accept his state voucher as a form of payment. Jérôme Dupaux to Secretary of War, 19 August 1886, folder 10694, Guerre et Marine, ANH, PauP.

These benefits were not always forthcoming, but remained expected entitlements for the core soldiery.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the military functioned not only as an agency of insurgency but also one that vowed to provide social services to its vast male members. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, the military was populous and comprised twenty thousand men in a nation of about seven hundred thousand people.<sup>28</sup> Lundalh states, "The size of the army was double that of Great Britain and most other European nations calculated on a per capita basis."<sup>29</sup> With such a large core soldiery, the military consumed sixty-five percent of state expenditures.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the state subsidized the livelihood of thousands of soldiers who were peasants. In fact, the nineteenth-century military was likely the most generous and expansive welfare institution in Haiti with nothing comparable to it in Haitian history after it was abolished during U.S. intervention. Lacking access to such state benefits otherwise, many male peasants decided to join the military as non-conscripted soldiers to receive official benefits to climb the social ladder.

These military benefits created a comfortable middle class of former enslaved Africans and their peasant descendants. Some of Haiti's famous later bourgeoisie writers, for example, were beneficiaries of military wealth. Jean-Price Mars, who was later recognized as the founder of negritude, never joined the military but his education was subsidized by relatives in the military: these were generals and later presidents, Tirésias Simon Sam and Vilbrun Guillaume Sam.<sup>31</sup> We know President Guillaume Sam for the violent death he suffered by popular revolt that was followed by U.S. invasion, but it is noteworthy to mention that he also came to power

---

<sup>27</sup> See n.18.

<sup>28</sup> Dubois, *Haiti*, 170.

<sup>29</sup> Lundalh, *Peasants and Poverty*, 375.

<sup>30</sup> Lundahl, 377.

<sup>31</sup> Magdeline W. Shannon, *Jean-Price Mars, the Haitian Elites and the American Occupation, 1915-35*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 17.



through popular insurrection. He was merely following the path of warfare and success carved out by nineteenth-century peasant insurgents that utilized their status in the military to participate in popular revolts to climb up the social ladder.



**Figure 1. The Young Jean Price-Mars. This image was taken prior to the U.S. intervention. It shows a young Price-Mars in military regalia sporting a saber. Although never officially enlisted in the national military, Price-Mars had familial ties to military officers and clearly associated himself with the militaristic culture of Haiti**

\*\*\*\*\*

Many started the journey to power as humble small-farming soldiers. Participating in popular revolts enabled them to become military officers and more. Throughout the nineteenth century, insurrections and revolutions occurred frequently and offered opportunities for ordinary soldiers to climb the military hierarchy. To seize power in the capital, political elites recruited ordinary soldiers to stir revolt, and elites promised these soldiers elevation in ranks if the insurrection was successful. On the other hand, the Haitian state also recruited civilian peasants and soldiers to defend the status quo, with promises to distribute military rank. The more revolutions fought, the more peasant soldiers were promoted to officer positions. In 1867, President Nissage Saget quipped, "the only thing left to do is issue a decree making everyone

general.”<sup>32</sup> Haiti became full of them. This reality was captured in the title of a sensationalized French travelogue about Haiti: *A Nation of Generals*.<sup>33</sup>

By the late nineteenth-century, those soldiers who were not promoted complained to the Department of War. On 15 June 1885, the soldier Siméon Algraidre (Alfred?) wrote to superiors: “I come very respectable to solicit your good sincerity an officer position, I served the Homeland since a man but in the revolutions I gained nothing.”<sup>34</sup> This was not an unreasonable request given the frequency of military promotions through revolutions. They occurred so frequently that Haitian officers made up almost one half of an already oversized army. And many obtained their post by participating in insurrections. Thus, peasant ambitions to rise up the military hierarchy helped fuel the recurring revolutions that brought down more than a dozen governments. To be sure, revolutions destabilized national politics. But revolutions also created one of the few mechanisms that facilitated social mobility in a nation where access to opportunities were quite limited.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, insurrections expanded the material conditions of formerly enslaved Haitians and their peasant descendants. Soldiers and officers participated in insurrections for material rewards that propelled them from their status as smallholders into the rural middle class.

In other words, years of popular revolutions turned *cultivateurs* soldiers into mid-sized landowning military officers. Some political leaders offered hard cash and land to rebel soldiers and *cultivateurs*. When President Sylvain Salnave was overthrown by an uprising, for example, the succeeding government decreed that land and money would be distributed to the participants

---

<sup>32</sup>Alain Turnier, *Avec Mérisier Jeannis: Une tranche de vie jacmélienne et nationale* (Port-au-Prince: Le Natal, 1982), 23. Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 169-170.

<sup>33</sup> Turnier, *Avec Merisier Jeannis*, 20.

<sup>34</sup>” Siméon Agraidre to Secretary of War, 15 June 1885, folder 11813, Guerre et Marine, ANH, PauP.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 169-170.

of the insurrection.<sup>36</sup> Lacking revenue, however, the state mostly distributed land because it was the largest landowner in Haiti. And by the middle of the century, the Haitian state no longer gave out large estates as it once did, but rather distributed mid-sized plots to officers. On 18 June 1896, the second in military command of the mountaintop town of Plaisance, Victor Thomy, could only: "pray you accord me this five *carreaux* [approx. fifteen acres] of land promised by the Government." Though a general, Thomy wrote that he was a "*malheureux*" that deserved a land grant from the government since he served his "country faithfully."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the Haitian army was an organization of armed *malheureux* searching to better their material lives. And even when they did, peasants who became mid-sized landowning generals continued to see themselves as *malheureux cultivateurs* and lived in peasant communities. Thus these officers belonged to an expanding stratum of mid-sized landowners [or *habitant propriétaire*] that still saw themselves as part of the peasant masses. Put simply they were peasant generals.

By the mid to late nineteenth-century, the position of a military officer was not a status that produced a large-landowning military elite that commanded involuntary labor of *cultivateurs*. Many generals were merely *malheureux* but with substantial land and status. And even though owning more land than ordinary peasants, many officers labored on their farms side-by-side with the *malheureux*. This was case because officers had limited options to compel labor within a sufficiently armed society that prevented the enforcement of defunct post-emancipation laws.<sup>38</sup> Instead, officers came up with morally based methods to extract labor from soldier peasants that lived free from of compulsive labor laws.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Turnier, *Avec Merisier Jeannis*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Victor Thomy to Secretary of Agriculture, 18 June 1896, folder 13167, *Agriculture*, ANH, PauP.

<sup>38</sup> By the mid nineteenth century, vagabondage, for example, remained in law but came to reflect the efforts of peasant resistance in revised codes under President Fabre Geffrard. Vagabondage no longer described "vagabond" who refused to labor on plantations. Instead, vagabond described peasants who refused to work on their own plots,

Without much unfree labor to exploit on their mid-sized plots, rural generals either ordered low ranking soldiers to perform involuntary work as matter of duty, or provided soldiers with food and gifts in exchange for their labor. In one case, the peasant soldier named Cryphon Gracia of St. Michel de l'Attalaye wrote to the president accusing the local general named Gaspard of impressing him and other soldiers into *corvée* labor. The commander of the district reported back to the president that Gracia had "exaggerated" what actually occurred. Instead, the commander urged the president that Gracia was obliged by the local general to participate in a "*combit*," whereby local soldiers were cajoled to labor in exchange for cuts of meat and likely music. He wrote, "if certain *militaires* are known to work in his garden, it is while he hosts a *combit*...that this occasion he had killed cows."<sup>40</sup> *Combit* (or *kombit*) is still practiced today and has come to symbolize reciprocal collective action in Haiti. But very few know what this document suggests; that is, *combit* emerged out of nineteenth-century practices by military generals to cajole a militarized citizenry to labor. Because compulsion was usually out of the question, generals relied on practices of reciprocal exchange to extract labor from armed peasants. Unfortunately for generals, such moral means of engendering agricultural production could not achieve great surplus wealth.

Thus, some generals sought wealth by acquiring state posts that they sometimes utilized for exploitation to generate additional income. The rise of so many generals, however, helped disrupt the concentration of power within a single person or entity and checked tyrannical

---

honor half-and-half sharecropping (*démoitié*) agreements, or farm at all. Rural codes also chastised peasants who did not work as vagabonds (Kr: *vakabon*) or *sans aveu* (without profession), which often, according to the law, led to "bad passion-laziness and theft." The intent of the law meant to control the mobility of peasants to prevent insurgent mobilization. But the law tacitly acknowledged independent labor and small farming by peasants. In addition, late nineteenth-century prison and court records have not revealed a single case in which peasants were arrested for vagabondage. 1864 Code Rurale, article, 108.

<sup>39</sup> 1864 Code Rurale, article, 108.

<sup>40</sup> *Le Citoyen* Cryphon Gracia to Son Excellence le Président D'Haiti, 23 December 1899, folder 12421, ANH, PauP.

impulses. Put simply, a general seeking to exploit a nation of generals was a contentious task. In 1871, for example, General Nord Isaac of Borgne arbitrarily instituted a toll on a cross ferry that other officers and soldiers were subjected to pay. However, many local soldiers refused and revolted. In a letter against General Nord, another Borgne officer complained, “*militaires* are so mistreated that they have not taken to their posts” and the situation would remain as such until “the Government forms a cover over our heads, a relaxed assistance against this jeopardy.” The complaining officer explained in his letter why the toll tax was regarded as an ignominy, “The general does not understand that gentlemen [*hommes de bien*] must be treated like men purely free and independent and not treat us like men of little consequence.” Mutiny and insurrection followed: “The gentlemen arrived forcefully with an armed offensive and told him, general Nord, that’s enough commanding without discipline, that’s enough fraud and no order...”<sup>41</sup>

Political hierarchies were subverted due to the constant influx of peasant soldiers becoming generals by participating in popular insurrections. And for many others who were not officially soldiers or officers, they still carried themselves as generals. In the late nineteenth-century, one commander complained one day that a group of young men in his town refused to salute him. When he pressed them about the matter, the young men demanded the general salute them first!<sup>42</sup> Popular insurrections made Haiti an egalitarian place for people of African descent and this tradition of revolting stemmed from the Haitian revolution.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

<sup>41</sup> General Louis Cleiuceat to Secretary of State of the Department of *Guerre et Marine*, 11 September 1871, folder 12926, Guerre et Marine, ANH, PauP.

<sup>42</sup> Alain Turnier, *Avec Mérésier Jeannis: Une tranche de vie jacmélienne et nationale* (Port-au-Prince: Le Natal, 1982), 23.

As uprisings turned thousands of peasants into generals and democratized political power, roving insurgent armies also looted the state and the urban towns.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the nation, insurgent armies besieged towns and left civilian casualties. On 8 December 1881, five rebels, "in revolt of the constitutional Government," bombarded the town of St. Marc for thirty-six hours leaving "many victims."<sup>44</sup> Other peasant rebels were known for setting entire towns ablaze and pillaging farms. That same year one Port-Salut mayor decried in a speech: "our citizens of the countryside had been without cessation turned away from agricultural work to steal the assistance of the state, the society menaced by these political speculators who dream of trouble, upheavals, disorder, pillage and ruin, to settled down with their personal wealth at the expense of public wealth."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, insurgents targeted urban centers and state coffers for looting, but they also targeted ordinary peasants and their farms for theft, which peasants grew to dislike this culture of banditry associated with insurgencies.

Leaving their farms behind when on the warpath and thus travelling without a chief source for sustenance, starving insurgents often turned into bandits and targeted peasant communities. Anxious and tense about roving armed bandits pillaging their properties, many ordinary peasants armed themselves and carried out acts of vigilantism. One midnight in 1881, the peasant named Bolival of Anse-a-Veau camped out in his farm on the look out for "thieves," and blasted his gun at a group of three suspects entering his property, only to wound himself with

---

<sup>43</sup> Gaillard, *Charlemagne Péralte le caco* (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1982) 122.

<sup>44</sup> General J.B.C. Cuvier to Secretary of *Guerre et Marine*, 17 December 1881, folder 12555, *Guerre et Marine*, ANH, PauP.

<sup>45</sup> "La fortune publique a diminué chez nous. Pourquoi parce que nos citoyens de la campagne ont été sans cesse détournés de leurs travaux agricoles pour voler au secours des gouvernements de la société menacés par la spéculateur politique qui ni rêvent qui trouble, bouleversement, désordre, pillage et ruine, pour asseoir leur fortune personnelle à la [creolized] place dela [creolized] fortune publique." Le Magistral Communal de Port-Salut to Secrétaire l'État, 1 May 1888, l'Intérieur, folder 13235, ANH, PauP

the flying bullet fragments.<sup>46</sup> Bolival was only reacting to growing rumors about the specter of roving thieves. In the northern town in Limbé, General Servius Joseph François complained in a report that “thieves are today more audacious than ever.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Haitians had to deal with the reality that insurgencies protected freedoms in the Haitian countryside but also fostered popular terror.

Indeed, Haiti was a martial society that sometimes took aim at itself. For example, dueling was widespread in the countryside.<sup>48</sup> In the early twentieth century, the General Pyrus Rampart of Verrettes complained about the “disorder” of dueling in one local rural district. “Most of the inhabitants commit injury against each other with aid of their firearms,” bemoaned the general.<sup>49</sup> No doubt banditry, vigilantism, and dueling fostered concerns among Haitians, but these violent tensions partly originated from initial state designs that narrowed opportunity to militarism. In addition, the state preserved defunct post-emancipation laws that spurred violent conflict.

Thus, peasants utilized their weapons to strike against state officials attempting to enforce laws that impeded on their freedoms. For instance, the state outlawed cockfights, a regular pastime in the countryside, because the state understood that leisure kept peasants away from farm work. In 1895, a police agent attempted to stop an unlawful cockfight in a rural district of Jean Rabel, but was violently thwarted in his actions. “Arriving at the place, he caught the violators in the act, and as he cried: in the name of the law; an individual stabbed him with a

---

<sup>46</sup> Commander of Anse-a-Veau to Secretary of State, 6 September. 1871, folder 12926, Guerre et Marine, ANH, PauP.

<sup>47</sup> Servius Joseph François to Secretary of State of Guerre et la Marine, 20 June 1881, folder 12555, ANH, PauP.

<sup>48</sup> René, “*Le Culte de l’égalité*,” 291-292.

<sup>49</sup> Pyrus Rampart to Secretary of Department of Interior, 12 May 1915, folder 11817, *Armée d’Haiti*, ANH, PauP.

sword," reported the local commander L. Céléstin Jeune.<sup>50</sup> In these instances, an armed population often blunted state force bent on repressing peasant freedoms. The state constantly confronted an armed citizenry plotting against it right up to the moment of foreign invasion. For instance, guns and firepower widely circulated among the population.

Many persons were discovered with firepower, as was the case in 1901 when authorities arrested the woman Madame Carida Pierre Louis for possessing gunpowder and four bullets belonging to a Remington rifle.<sup>51</sup> Conducting patrols in Dame Marie, one general discovered seventeen guns in two rural districts.<sup>52</sup> These guns were often utilized in popular conspiracies to overthrow the state. Between 1896 and 1915, almost every head of state was forced out of power by armed insurrections. In one dramatic case, President Cincinnatus Leconte died in his sleep from a mysterious explosion that destroyed the National Palace. Firepower and insurrections chipped apart the Haitian state.

But they also terrorized the greater population. An elite figure named Gabriel Lerouge accompanied groups of peasant insurgents in the north called the *cacos* and *zandolites*. He noted in a journal that upon arriving in La-Coupe-Michel these groups destroyed properties, stole, and raped women. Furthermore on 7 August 1914, Lerouge observed forty-five homes set afire in the town of Terrier Rouge.<sup>53</sup> The presence of roving insurgent armies bred fear and violence. Even disobedient insurgents faced violence from their own leaders. "I will tell you frankly if any men are disorderly, shoot them, even two or three by my order," one *caco* general wrote to officers under his command, as they marched south in 1915 with plans to overthrow President

---

<sup>50</sup> L. Céléstin Jeune to Secretary of Interior, 13 May 1895, Interior, ANH, PauP.

<sup>51</sup> Commander Edmond Defly to Secretary of Interior, 28 November 1901, folder 12496, Interior, ANH, PauP.

<sup>52</sup> General Edgard Lévêque to Secretary of Interior, 16 May 1915, folder 11817, Armée d'Haiti, ANH, PauP.

<sup>53</sup> Gaillard, *Charlemagne*, 122.



Vilbrun Guillaume Sam and put Bobo in power.<sup>54</sup> Guillaume Sam lost his life during the rebellion and the U.S. invaded Haiti. But the fear of becoming a victim to banditry, vigilantism, duels, and political violence produced popular grievances that the U.S. force exploited to invade and usurp control in Haiti.

But peasants lost their guns and swords in the process that had long been associated with freedom since the Haitian Revolution. Nicholls remarked, “From the revolutionary period (1789-1803) to the U.S. occupation (1915-34), large numbers of Haitians had been in possession of firearms, and it was only with the defeat of the *cacos* rebellion under Charlemagne Peralte... that people were generally disarmed.”<sup>55</sup> Peralte, as we shall see, was a peasant general that was disenchanted by U.S. policies of suppressing the militarized culture through incarceration and policing the countryside. Peralte himself was arrested and jailed before leading a major peasant insurrection against U.S. intervention. Peralte and traditions of popular revolt that fostered freedom would perish during the U.S. occupation.

Historians often argue that the United States perceived popular unrest in the Caribbean and Latin America as threatening to its geopolitical and economic interests. U.S. forces invaded sovereign nations, goes this thinking, on the basis that political instability caused by uprisings threatened their interests. In Haiti, however, foreign interest was moderately threatened by uprisings and yet the momentum of U.S. imperialism spreading across the Caribbean overtook Haiti regardless.<sup>56</sup> To be sure, the U.S. desired to take control of the country’s national finances to ensure debt payment to U.S. bankers. Haiti’s neighbor, the Dominican Republic, was already

---

<sup>54</sup> D.J. Pierre to Generals Octavien and Ose, 29 August 1915, Box 5, Bobo letters in folder Caco Correspondence, Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC

<sup>55</sup> Nicholls, 167.

<sup>56</sup> In 1898, the U.S. intervened in Puerto Rican and Cuban independence struggles against the Spanish crown and made both countries protectorates. The U.S. occupied Panama in 1903; Nicaragua in 1906; the Dominican Republic in 1916; and purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark in 1917. Schmidt, 5.

forced to sign a convention in 1907 that conceded its customs houses to the U.S. With control of the Dominican customs houses, the U.S. managed repayment of foreign debt and meddled in Dominican affairs. However, Haiti proved a reliable payer of debt.

Worried about U.S. interloping, the Haitian state strove to pay off its foreign debt so consistently that, as one historian points out, "payment was exemplary compared to that of other Latin-American countries."<sup>57</sup> But the U.S. had its eyes set on invading Haiti not only because it should but also because it could. That is to say, the U.S. invasion of Haiti was not merely driven by financial and geopolitical interests but also a dogma of exercising colonial might for power sake. Before 1915, U.S. officials spent years plotting to invade Haiti, but predictions of racial tensions delayed this imperial endeavor. For years, the U.S. worried about confronting what they imagined was a nation built on revolutionary principles of freedom and a black consciousness.

For example, Elihu Root, the Secretary of State under Theodore Roosevelt's administration, observed, "The Haitians are suspicious of us...they have pretty good reasons for doubting the advantages of too close an association between the United States and a black man's government." Understanding that U.S. invasion would likely prompt racial tensions, Root cautioned, "I have been watching every move in Haiti for several years very closely in the hope that a situation would arise in which we could give that help in such a way as to establish the right sort of relations. We have done something in that direction, but any positive step I think we must wait for the 'psychological moment.'"<sup>58</sup> U.S. leaders envisioned invading Haiti in ways that would sidestep the racial and post-emancipation legacies of both countries. In the midst of international power play and growing suspicions of President Guillaume Sam surrendering customs houses to the U.S., another popular insurrection occurred that was led by the rebel

---

<sup>57</sup> Schmidt, 43.

<sup>58</sup> Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 8.

leader Dr. Bobo. This last insurrection culminated in the president's death and produced a confusing political situation that divided Haiti and presented the right "psychological moment" in which U.S. forces invaded and justified their action based on promises to restore order. Regardless, and even after years of plotting, the U.S. imperial project in Haiti had a chaotic start.<sup>59</sup>

Upon executing plans to seize political control, came dizzying confusion and racist views on the part of U.S. officials that complimented political instability in Haiti. "Not at all sure what we ought to do," the State Department Counselor Robert Lansing wrote to President Wilson just six days after the invasion, "or what we legally can do." President Wilson's response revealed that he was also unsure, "we have not the legal authority to do what we apparently ought to do."<sup>60</sup> The invading marines were equally dumbfounded. "Something is going on in Haiti," Private Faustin Wirkus was told before departure, "which required the Marines to land, and take the situation in hand."<sup>61</sup> Nor did they know, Wirkus admitted, where the nation was located. "Somebody said Haiti was a land of black people—'just like in Africa.'" And, thus, many drew on notions of anti-black racism.<sup>62</sup> Lansing wrote, "The experience of Liberia and Haiti shows that the African race are devoid of any capacity for political organization and lack genius for government."<sup>63</sup> Despite this confusion, the U.S. proceeded with its imperial project in Haiti and

---

<sup>59</sup> But U.S. plans to invade were devised years in advance. For example, the U.S. formulated plans to invade Haiti six months in advance. In November 1914, U.S. officials drew up the "Plan for Landing and Occupying Haiti the City of Port-au-Prince" warning that "five thousands soldiers and civilian mobs" threatened foreign interests. See, Quoting Radiogram Daniels to U.S. *Connecticut*, July 21, 1914 in Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 64. When Guillaume Vilbrun was overthrown in 1915, as the historian Roger Galliard nicely put it, U.S. officials took out of the "file cabinet the plans for the landing, and after having adjusted to the circumstances, put them in application." "*Il sortir de ses tiroirs les plans débarquement, et après les avoir ajustés aux circonstances, les mit en application.*" See Gaillard, *écrasement*, 12; Schmidt, 65-67; and Dubois, 210.

<sup>60</sup> Schmidt, 70.

<sup>61</sup> Dubois, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Dubois, 225-226.

<sup>63</sup> Dubois, 214.

forms of control were imagined through a racist lens that spurred conflict rather than political stability. And above all, the U.S. took away peasant arms that they utilized to protect their freedom of mobility and labor since the Haitian Revolution.

### **Initial Responses to U.S. Invasion**

On 28 July 1915, the U.S. Marines invaded Haiti and professed to restore order after the murder of the president by a popular mob. Upon invading, U.S. forces immediately came under gunfire and clashed with various armed elements in the capital and provinces.<sup>64</sup> After the U.S. undemocratically handpicked Sudre Dartiguenave as president, armed supporters of Bobo vowed to oppose the occupation. In response, U.S. officials attempted to negotiate with insurgents as a tactic to demilitarize the population. The most influential insurgents were known as the *cacos* and operated throughout the northern provinces. On September 14, the U.S. signed an accord with *caco* leaders in the rustic northern town of Quartier Morin, with many insurgents agreeing to the conditions of popular disarmament. According to the Haitian newspaper *Le Matin*, “the result of the meeting had been more than satisfactory.” Soon after, some *caco* insurgents began surrendering their arms. One such surrender included a transaction in which U.S. officials drew funds from the seized Haitian customs houses, purchased 595 rifles for \$5 each and paid three generals the total sum of \$6,600.<sup>65</sup> However, other *caco* insurgents refused foreign occupation altogether.

The *caco* and military general Antoine Morency declared that he would not disarm unless Bobo became president.<sup>66</sup> Some *caco* rebels resisted the invasion on grounds that the U.S. meant to re-enslave Haitians. “America annexation means slavery,” read one circular written by the

---

<sup>64</sup> On the night three marines landed in Haiti, two U.S. soldiers were fired upon and killed. See, Roger Gaillard, *Premier écrasement du cacoïsme* (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1981), 14.

<sup>65</sup> Schmidt, 83.

<sup>66</sup> Gaillard, *écrasement*, 109

*caco* rebel Benoit Rameau, who started his professional life as a servant but rose to the heights of a military general through participating in popular insurrections.<sup>67</sup> Many *caco* rebels were military officers. It is quite likely that most military soldiers in the north were also part of the secret insurgent organization of *caco*. And they were unwilling to give up traditions of armed rebellion that helped foster peasant freedoms since the Haitian Revolution.

“I will die than live under the protection of strangers,” declared the *caco* rebel and military general Jacque Marcelin in a letter dated on 20 October 1915. Camped in a hideout near the Dominican border with his *caco* division, Marcelin disregarded the U.S. order to disband and disarm, professing his commitment to northern traditions of popular revolt, “I will not give up a single rifle even after all the divisions have done so...I am fully *caco*.”<sup>68</sup> Although many bravely resisted, insurgents possessed outdated rifles, swords, and machetes and were ill equipped to fight against U.S. advanced weaponry on the battlefield. Thus, the early waves of popular uprisings in the north were violently put down by the U.S. forces. While many resisted occupation, another class of citizens supported it.

Haitians were actually divided on whether to support the occupation or not. Indeed, popular uprisings and insurrections aided many Haitians exercise their democratic rights as citizens and climb the social ladder. However, many others resented the terrorizing aspects of popular uprisings. Furthermore, popular violence related to insurrections began to overwhelm the state. Between 1911 and 1915, insurrections made it impossible for any government to stay in power for longer than a year. Political instability along with roving insurgent bands caused

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 109

<sup>68</sup> General Jacque Marcelin to Delegate Basse Bernard, 20 October 1915, Box 5, folder Caco Correspondences, Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

social upheaval as they laid siege to towns, cut food circulation, spread banditry, and much more. Desiring to see an end to popular violence, many Haitians supported the U.S. invasion.

Urban elites, in particular, showed support for the invasion by transmitting anti-insurgent propaganda. "I hate insurrections with all my nerves, with all my brain, with all my blood," the minister of interior swore in the newspaper *Le Matin*.<sup>69</sup> The popular urban singer Auguste de Pradines "Candio" blamed popular uprisings for the U.S. invasion in a musical composition:

There's something we need to be honest about,  
And it is what makes everyone have hard teeth (silent)  
Uprisings... in the South, *Cacos* in the North,  
For their straw-sacks to be fuller, heavier,  
Who's doing this? Educated men  
And stupid men, all mixed up together.  
It was all this that brought you the foreign/white Americans  
No one can say they don't know.<sup>70</sup>

Other elites resented the frequent revolts because they disrupted the circulation of agricultural crops from the countryside to cities, which urban elites depended on for daily sustenance. On 27 October 1915, the state *chargé* of Saint-Louis du Nord breathed a sigh of relief: "Agriculture, which in the past was neglected or shall we say abandoned by the lack of hands and by the fact of recurring revolutions that swept the country, has retaken its strength and vigor and has permitted the peasants to do their great farm work." The *chargé* reported to authorities that efforts were made to spread the news to St. Louis peasants of stability under the occupation and its president: "I have not missed the opportunity to talk to them advantageously of the government of Mr. Sudre Dartiguenave [president appointed by U.S. forces] who has sworn to

---

<sup>69</sup> Gaillard, *écrasement*, 106.

<sup>70</sup>This song is quoted in full by Roger Gaillard in *Les cents jours de Rosalvo Bobo* (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1973), 243; Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 148-151.

offer Peace for a long time in order to make up for all their losses that they have endured by civil war.”<sup>71</sup>

In addition, some of the landowning peasantry hoped that the presence of the occupying forces would end insurrections, political violence, vigilantism, and vengeful killings, which often terrorized the rural population. “Your intervention in this Country is to prevent theft, murder, and pillage,” asserted the mid-sized landowning peasant Fromelin François of Pilate in a letter to U.S. officers in Cap-Haïtien. While François lay in bed with a sore foot in June 1916, “someone came and put his gun just in the side where my bed was and fired a shot, which thank god, did not hurt me...and ran into the woods.”<sup>72</sup> In another case on 21 October 1917, the wife of Trejean [her name not given] watched as her husband was tied to a tree by two of his brothers who accused him of thievery in St. Michel de l’Attalaye. When Mrs. Trejean tried to offer her husband water, her brothers-in-law attacked her, then turned to their brother and hacked him to death with their machetes.<sup>73</sup> A history of taking the law into their own hands fostered a culture of peasants administering forms of popular justice and vengeful killings. Terrorized by these forms of

---

<sup>71</sup> “*L’Agriculture, qui ces temps derniers a été négligée ou pour dire abandonnée par manqué de bras par le fait des révolutions tropes souvent répété que vient de traverser le pays, a repris force et vigueur et se feu de jours de repars a permis aux habitants de faire de grands travaux.*” Léon Augustin to Secrétaire d’Etat au Département de l’Agriculture et des Travaux Publics, 27 October 1915, 11862, Interior, ANH, PauP.

<sup>72</sup> Francis suspected one man of being the assailant and called upon the rural police to process his arrest [*mandat* or warrant] which was done with the presumption that the accused was guilty and without rendering a formal or thorough investigation (though probably standard practice given it is still done today). In court the suspect was released on account that he was unlawfully arrested and Francis was ordered to pay court fees and a fine of 150 gourdes payable to the accused for slander and false accusation of being a murderer. Francis’ complaint to the U.S. officials was that the fine was exorbitant and thus unjust; U.S. officials, on the other hand, saw this case as an example of a corrupt legal system and requested the judges to be removed. See, Fromelin Francis to Grand Prévôt Cap-Haïtien, 11 January 1917, Box 6, folder Department of Cape, Gendarmerie D’Haïti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>73</sup> When the alleged Trejean brothers were arrested by the gendarmes and brought to court in the city of Gonaïves where they openly admitted to their actions (their testimony is not available), they were arraigned and immediately released by the courts after paying a fee of 30 *gourdes*. For U.S. officials, legal actions of this sort produced “lawlessness.” But the courts, aside from possibly being corrupt, could have been tacitly acknowledging its limitations. The U.S. officials rearrested the Trejean brothers and detained them “for the welfare of the community.” See, Commanding Officer N.A. Eastman to Headquarters Gendarmerie Port-au-Prince, 9 November 1917, Box 9, folder 10th Company Reports, Gendarmerie D’Haïti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

popular terror, these cases reveal that some peasants hoped that the presence of occupation forces would stabilize local conflict that could lead to gruesome acts of violence. Still, many Haitians soon realized that U.S. involvement in Haiti threatened their rights and freedoms.

With the intrusion of U.S. forces, the military traditions that provided social mobility and status were repressed. In terms of military rank, U.S. soldiers did not recognize the standing of generals and soldiers who previously enjoyed high status in rural communities. Instead of receiving the traditional treatment as prisoners of war, U.S. soldiers treated military elements as mere convicts by jailing and sentencing them to hard labor for their resistance. U.S. soldiers handled many Haitian officers and soldiers dishonorably and in a degrading fashion. This treatment included forcing officers and soldiers into chain gangs that performed public works in convict suits while sweeping sidewalks.<sup>74</sup> For many generals, public humiliation and degradation began with arrests.

In the past, generals were leading figures in their communities. However, during the U.S. invasion, a number of generals were arrested and thrown in jail. In the fall of 1915, U.S. soldiers arrested General Baez Bernard who was a wealthy peasant living in the high mountains of Perches (a three hour climb, according to U.S. officials). Commander Pierrelus Pierre, also of Perches and known as an influential healer and practitioner of the African-derived religion of *Vodou*, was arrested in December but escaped prison days later and fled to the Dominican Republic. Living in the mountains between Terrier Rouge and Grand Bassin, General Choute Gustave was arrested by U.S. soldiers. Choute's arrest was ordered by U.S. Colonel Littleton W.T. Waller who, as we shall see, was influential in carrying out plans to force the population

---

<sup>74</sup> The former commander and *caco* rebel Charlemagne Peralte was arrested in 1917 and forced to sweep the sidewalk in Cap in a convict suit. See, Gaillard, *Hinche mise en croix*, (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1982), 153 and 133-138.



into unfree labor and jailing others as forms of social control that disarmed the population.<sup>75</sup>

With roots in the post-emancipated U.S. South, Waller was charged with suppressing traditions of insurrections in Haiti that brought him to confront the legacies of the Haitian Revolution. And he did so with domestic views in mind that disdained the idea of armed black people. Regarding Haitians, Waller once remarked, “you can never trust a nigger with a gun.”<sup>76</sup> He imagined that Haiti had many of them and helped devised a plan to throw them in jail.

### **Imposing U.S. Imperial Control: Gendarmes, Jails, and Forced Labor as Methods of Social Control**

Groomed in a post-emancipated and racially charged U.S. southern society, Colonel Waller was well known for his anti-black racism and yet was still appointed to lead the U.S. invasion in Haiti. Waller was born on a Tidewater Virginian plantation where his family owned enslaved blacks. Waller was about ten years old when the Civil War ended, which brought emancipation and left many slave plantations in ruins. Yet like many southern white men of his generation searching to redeem their masculinity torn by the defeat of the Civil War, Waller joined and became corporal of the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues militia that possibly oversaw racial violence during the end of Reconstruction and at the beginning of Jim Crow.<sup>77</sup> Waller’s

---

<sup>75</sup> Memorandum for Brigade, 22 April 1920, Box 4, folder Bandits Activities and Distributions, Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>76</sup> Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 103.

<sup>77</sup> On 26 September 1856, Waller was born on a York County slave plantation in Tidewater Virginia that was owned by his family. A year after the Civil War, Waller was ten-years old when Virginia passed the 1866 Vagrancy Law Act that attempted to restrict the freed population to plantation labor after slavery. Some time between the period of Reconstruction and Jim Crow, Waller became the corporal of the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues militia, which possibly oversaw political terror targeting African Americans in Virginia. On Waller’s birthdate and militia membership, see Glenn M. Harned, *Marine Corps Generals, 1899-1936: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (North Carolina: Mcfarland and Company, 2015), 43. On the history of the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues as part of the Confederate Army during the Civil War, see John Walters, *Norfolk Blues: Norfolk Light Artillery Blues* (Pennsylvania: Burd Street Press, 1997). On the history of southern militias and popular white terror during Reconstruction and Jim Crow, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, Cambridge: Belknap Press (2003), 265-316.

life trajectory and racist views made him the unlikely candidate to carry out an imperial project that promised stability in Haiti that consciously declared its citizens as black.

Yet with the departure of the admiral in charge of invasion forces in early 1916, Waller was assigned to command the U.S. forces in Haiti and his racist views were well documented. “I know the nigger and how to handle him,” Waller once observed in regards to controlling Haitians. Waller described one Haitian beggar as “the blackest bluegum nigger you ever saw.” Regarding Haitian elites, he once told another colonel, “These people are niggers in spite of the thin varnish of education and refinement. Down in their hearts they are just the same happy, idle irresponsible people we know of.” And Waller, upon hearing news that the marines might be working under the command of a Haitian clientele president, sneered, “Did you ever hear of anything so fantastic in your life?”<sup>78</sup> Waller's comparison of Haitians to the racial epithet “nigger” was to say that Haitians should be imagined and treated similarly to African-Americans in the U.S. Waller once remarked, “They are real nigger and no mistake—There are some very fine looking, well educated polished men here but they are real nigs beneath the surface. What people of Norfolk and Portsmouth would say if they saw me bowing and scraping to these coons—I do not know—All the same I do not wish to be outdone in formal politeness.”<sup>79</sup> These racial attitudes fused with U.S. imperial tactics and played out in forced labor policies and imprisonment that eventually prompted a large exodus and a major insurrection – all of which were counterproductive to an imperial project predicated on political stability.

Along with Waller, the officer Major Smedley D. Butler shared strong racist views that shaped the nature of the invasion. Surprisingly, Waller was viewed as the cooler head in comparison to Butler who hailed from a Northeastern Quaker family. Butler's racism was

---

<sup>78</sup> Dubois, 225-226.

<sup>79</sup> Schmidt, 81.

reserved for Haitian elites in particular. Confronted with a nation where thousands of peasants saw themselves as generals, Butler found many targets. One striking illustration occurred after an incident where one of his soldiers was seemingly challenged to a duel.

Butler wrote: "Last night the nephew of one of the prominent politicians attacked one of our... sentries, firing three shots at him. That [U.S. sentry] pursued him, and finally blew a hole in him as big as your fist, thus ending the life of a miserable cockroach. This morning there is a big uproar among the prominent citizens over the 'unjustifiable' shooting of this leader of society. However, if all the leaders will only get busy and attack sentries we will soon clean up this country." As the historian Hans Schmidt points out, this "Disdain for the educated elite and complementary expressions of affection for the uneducated, impoverished peasants masses paralleled contemporary racist values in the United States...those who exhibited wealth, education, or ambition were subject to attack as 'uppity niggers.'"<sup>80</sup> Put simply, racism toward perceived black elites in Haiti was still racism.

Among U.S. officers in the occupation, Butler and Waller were known as the duo that "adopted a policy of force."<sup>81</sup> Together, Butler and Waller became the architects of a harsh penal system and a militarized police state that reflected their racial attitudes and experiences as occupiers. Butler and Waller both worked in colonial projects throughout the Pacific and Caribbean. Before the U.S. invasion of Haiti, Waller served as a military officer in the 1898-1906 Philippine-American War where he and U.S. soldiers utilized racial violence, policing, and incarceration as methods to discipline and control the Filipino population.<sup>82</sup> Butler studied the

---

<sup>80</sup> Schmidt, 77-81. Gaillard cites a newspaper report and an oral interview with Price-Mars' son, among other sources, to establish the latter's arrest for *corvée*. Gaillard, *Hinche*, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Schmidt, 80.

<sup>82</sup> Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 143-145 and 314-320.

U.S.-created *Rural Guard* in Cuba a year before putting together in Haiti the constabulary police called the *Gendarmerie*.<sup>83</sup>

Domestic forms of racial repression and imperial practices of control converged in occupied Haiti. In February 1916, Butler dissolved the independent national military and ordered the construction of 117 *Gendarmerie* posts, which housed prisons, throughout the provinces. On the same day, Waller sent out a circular to all Haitian commanders of the indigenous military to disband, with US gendarme officers assuming their posts.<sup>84</sup> Gendarme officer positions, however, were only given to white U.S. marines while Haitians made up the rank-and-file. Indeed, Butler and Waller instituted a system of policing in Haiti that was the byproduct of knowledge obtained from colonialism mixed with domestic practices of racial segregation – a sort of Jim Crow colonialism. Racial segregation was also practice in public spaces that occurred most notably in the capital of Port-au-Prince. But urban forms of racism have dominated the attention of scholars, even though penal forms of Jim Crow prevailed in the Haitian countryside where the majority of the population lived.

Under the Butler-Waller period, Haitians experienced harsh police tactics that resembled Jim Crow in the U.S. South where black mobility and independent labor were criminalized. Beginning in early 1916, the Butler-Waller influence set in motion a new phase in the occupation's governance that employed gendarmes to enforce the previously defunct Haitian laws of *corvée* and *vagabondage* (vagrancy). These laws originated in post-emancipation practices of compelling Haitians to labor in conditions akin to slavery. Butler "re-discovered" the *corvée* and *vagabondage* laws and utilized them to round up unfree labor. This model of

---

<sup>83</sup> Gaillard, *La république autoritaire: les blancs débarquent, 1916-1917* (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1981), 20.

<sup>84</sup> Roger Gaillard, *La république autoritaire*, 20.

policing was vigorously pursued until the withdrawal of U.S. troops, leaving a bloody racist legacy in Haiti.

The U.S.-created *Gendarmerie* eventually became the arm of this new administration and coercively enforced preexisting legal codes and laws. However, scattered resistance on the part of former Haitian soldiers and officers continued to obstruct the U.S.'s initial imperial mission. In March 1916, a post in the northern region of Saint Michel de l'Attalaye came under rebel gunfire and sent gendarmes fleeing.<sup>85</sup> By April, U.S. marines and gendarmes returned to St. Michel but reported, "Very few men were visible."<sup>86</sup> St. Michel peasants disappeared in the nearby mountains and cliffs to regroup and carryout guerrilla warfare. On 3 May, the peasant insurgents reappeared and frightened the local magistrate with gunfire and cries for freedom. "Announcing to you at one o'clock in the morning, *beaucoup* shots of rifles were exploded in St. Michel, [insurgents] shouting '*vivre la liberté*,'" the magistrate telegraphed superiors. "The gendarmes were unable to resist to this disorder fleeing, and I was transported to Ennery to await your final decision."<sup>87</sup>

On July 14, a post in the mountaintop town of Carice was attacked and one gendarme "received a bullet to his face. All the gendarmes of Carice ran away."<sup>88</sup> Other insurgents urged the Haitian members of the *Gendarmerie* to join the rebel cause. "Run under the flag to save the country," read one poster placed on a gendarme barrack in Ferrier after

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Detachment Commander to Expeditionary Commander, 20 April 1916, Box 9, folder 10th Company of Gonaïves, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>87</sup> To find full details on the clashes between gendarmes and St. Michel insurgents, see Gaillard, *Écrasement*, 41-52. Communal Magistrate Desruisseaus Etienne Gilles to Minister of Interior, 6 March 1916, Box 9, folder 10th Co, Gonaïves, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>88</sup> Sergeant Pierre Jean to Commanding 15ème Company de la Gendarmerie d'Haiti Ouanaminthe, 15 July 1916, Box 5, folder Caco Correspondence, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

insurgents attacked it in 1916.<sup>89</sup> Yet the occupying forces persisted and always returned to begin establishing a constant presence in peasant communities. Their presence was solidified through the revitalization of restrictive Haitian legal codes.

For instance, General Butler ordered the U.S. gendarmes to enforce *corvée* that required six days of public labor from rural denizens unable to pay road taxes.<sup>90</sup> Defending his use of the law, Butler presented the *corvée* as the simple solution to build better roads that opened up the impenetrable countryside to police the countryside more easily and disclose rebel hideouts. One major road, about 170-miles long, started from the capital in the southern tip of the island and cut through the northern region that was a rebel stronghold. However, U.S. forces went beyond the limits of the *corvée* law to build other structures unrelated to roadwork.

Although *corvée* was legally intended for building roads, U.S. forces also ordered *corvée* gangs to perform tasks incompatible with the law. Haitians recalled *corvée* prisoners scraping up excrement from the streets in Hinche.<sup>91</sup> Another U.S. practice straying outside the parameters of the *corvée* law was utilizing *corvée* gangs to build prisons that served as holding facilities for Haitians convicted of *vagabondage*. *Vagabondage* (vagrancy) was another old dormant code rooted in the legacies of slavery and post-emancipation that the U.S. enforced in order to criminalize mobility. After clashing with armed insurgents in St. Michel, for example, U.S. forces seized a thirty-acre farm owned by a general killed in the fighting. The general's farm became the grounds on which U.S. utilized *corvée* labor to build a vagabond prison.

Nothing more symbolized the threat to military customs of rights, freedom, and status than putting a prison on the farm of a general killed by U.S. forces. But with "'Covees'

---

<sup>89</sup> "Copy of Proclamation," Box 5, folder Caco Correspondences, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>90</sup> Article 54, 1864 *Code Rural*.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

amounting to four hundred men,” one officer reported to Butler in 1917, the building “[would] be used as quarters for convicted vagabonds.”<sup>92</sup> Using *corvée* labor to build prisons constituted an unlawful act on the part of U.S. officers. Yet, U.S. soldiers were unconcerned with the accuracy of these laws; they were merely enforced to generate involuntary labor that built infrastructures for more effective control. Roads made policing of the countryside easier and more prisons helped detain a rebellious population. All together, these constructions served to control Haitian society.

Increase in prisons and police also produced convict laborers that were compelled build or repair prisons to detain even more Haitians on misdemeanor charges. U.S. officials reported 159 revamped or new prisons that confined thousands.<sup>93</sup> This was drastically different from the penal practices prior to the invasion where jails were decrepit and barely populated. In 1890, the prison in Aux Cayes jailed six people in the span of six months, but in a single month during the U.S. invasion the Cayes prison reported 177 prisoners who "all but one are for misdemeanors, such as petty thievery."<sup>94</sup> Many peasants were arbitrarily arrested for petty crimes and detained against their will. Years later, one marine inadvertently admitted that peasants were picked up

---

<sup>92</sup> District Commander of Gonaïves to General Butler, 10 July 1917, Box 9, folder 10th Company of Gonaïves, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>93</sup> The Commanding Officer, Constabulary Detachment to Brigade Commander, 4 August 1920, Box 4, Bandit Reports, in Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>94</sup> La Commission Communale to Secretary of Interior, 7 October 1890, 10840, Interior, ANH, PauP. Director of Civil Prison to Department Commander, 16 July 1919, Box 7, Department of the South, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC. Nineteenth-century prisons in Haiti detained few prisoners. In the Petite Rivière d l'Artibonite, for instance, only two persons were arrested, tried, and sentenced to hard labor between 15 May and 25 August 1891. François Guilbaud to Secretary of Interior, 25 August 1891, 13238, Interior, ANH, PauP. U.S. forces found many Haitian prisons in poor conditions. One U.S. marine offered his superiors a description of the dilapidated jailhouse in Anse d'Hainault, “is a tumbled down old Haitian prison situated about five minutes walk from the center of the town. The situation is out of the way and is also very unsanitary, being opposite a swamp, and the condition of the building is such that it would not be worth while to have it repaired.” Department Commander Carl Svenson to Chief of Gendarmerie, 29 July 1919, Box 7, Department of South in Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC. Stationed in the southern region, one U.S. officer reported that unfree labor was utilized to repair prisons in Cavallion and Saint Louis. District Commander, Cayes to Department Commander, 7 November 1917, Box 9, folder 7th Co., District Commander in Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

because "they had no other place to sleep, probably... They were detained in the town. They were not allowed to leave the town."<sup>95</sup>

However, many of these peasants very well had their own living space. This marine's explanation was meant to excuse illegal detainment of the population. Even if peasants attempted to leave these prisons and free themselves, they were summarily executed. On the holiday of U.S. Independence, one officer reported that the prisoner Chialy Eland of St. Michel, arrested for stealing chickens, attempted to escape jail but "was challenged to halt. Failing to stop, the sentry fired three shots, – all of which were effective."<sup>96</sup> Although these methods of control were present in other U.S. colonial projects in the Pacific and the Caribbean, many U.S. contemporary observers compared U.S. penal practices in Haiti to the domestic racist practices of control in the U.S. South.

The comparison was so glaring that these observers assumed that Washington purposefully recruited southern soldiers to impose Jim Crow in Haiti.<sup>97</sup> One U.S. trade commissioner reported, "It would appear that the bulk of the men in charge of policing,

---

<sup>95</sup> Dubois, *Haiti*, 242

<sup>96</sup> Commander Officer 10th Company to Detachment Commander, 4 July 1916, Box 9, 10th Company Monthly, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>97</sup> At this juncture, the Dominican Republic was under U.S. military control. Local Dominicans were subjected to incarceration. But the U.S. imposed forced labor policies did not play out in the Dominican Republic as it did in Haiti. Vagrancy in the Dominican Republic "was first promulgated at a national level under the U.S. military government in 1920, but it was strictly enforced for the first time by the Trujillo state." See Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in the Dominican History* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 92-93. U.S. imposition of *corvée* in the Dominican Republic was also limited. "The Dominican occupation also imposed a Dominican *corvée* of sorts, as in Haiti, but in lieu of labor. Arguing against the *corvée*, merchants in San Francisco wanted better roads close to home to help bring their goods to market and as a reward for cooperating against the rebels. No nationwide numbers on road tax exists, but in one *común* over 27 percent refused to work or pay. The *ayuntamientos*, charged with collecting the road tax, largely did not. Marines reminded the president of San Pedro of his dereliction of duty because he raised only a third of the tax. An investigation found that over \$5,200 of the road tax went instead to 'other municipal services without proper authorization. In Los Llanos the *sindico* reported slightly better numbers for 1922: half paid rather than worked; the other half registered to work, but almost a third of those did nothing. He explained that the loafers were 'Haitians, Englishmen (*coclos*), and Dominicans from other communes' who moved to other towns when asked to labor on roads." McPherson, *The Invaded*, 155. The *corvée* appeared to be rigorously enforced later during the Trujillo dictatorship. Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, 106-107.



sanitation and other duties were drawn from those States where the race question has always been a matter of delicacy—Louisiana, Texas, etc.—and that the Southern attitude towards the black man was imported at the beginning and has operated to alienate many natives who might have been useful."<sup>98</sup> Studies have disproven allegations of a southern majority in the number of U.S. forces sent to Haiti, but the commissioner correctly suggested that the Butler-Waller period set in motion practices of social control that powerfully conjured up of racial repression in the minds of U.S. citizens. Haitians saw the harsh penal system as slavery itself.

One Haitian peasant laid out his argument to the historian Roger Gaillard during an oral interview: "One: the work isn't paid. Two: you worked with your back to the sun wearing nothing but pants. Three: they only sent you home when you were sick. Four: you didn't eat enough, just corn and beans. Five: You slept in a prison or at the construction site. Six: When you tried to run away, they killed you. Isn't that slavery?"<sup>99</sup> If this did not resemble slavery, then the occupation eerily resembled the incarceration practices of African Americans in the Jim Crow South. These measures were incorporated into a colonial project that sought to stabilize the political situation in Haiti. In reality, however, forced labor and incarceration destabilized peasant communities.

If peasants were caught in activities other than farming, U.S. forces arrested them as vagabonds and put them to work on plantations owned used by U.S. forces.<sup>100</sup> For instance,

---

<sup>98</sup> Schmidt, 144.

<sup>99</sup> Gaillard, *Hinche*, 224; Dubois, *Haiti*, 242-243.

<sup>100</sup> A revised English version of Haitian rural codes was issued to U.S. gendarmes. The codes criminalize mobility. One article read: "Throughout the extent of the localities under their direction, rural police officers should be on the lookout to see that no one lives in idleness... if these individuals cannot give a good account of themselves, they will be considered vagrants, and arrested as vagabonds." "Art.112, No cultivator, established on a rural property, may absent himself from the district for more than twenty four hours, without a permit from the Chief of District. Art.113: Except on market days, any individual found in a rural district, and cannot explain where he lives or whether he lives or whether he is employed by one of the proprietors of the section, or a paper proving his identity, will be considered a vagabond, he will be arrested by the rural police, officers, and guards of the locality, and immediately brought before the justice of the peace of the commune. Art. 114: The justice of the peace, after having

those convicted were forced to labor on potato plantations that likely provisioned U.S. soldiers. In June 1917, Butler instructed one commander to seek out fifty acres of vacant land for a potato farm where “LABOR TO BE PERFORMED BY VAGABONDS.”<sup>101</sup> On 25 July 1917 another marine named Baker sent a telegram to Butler affirming, “potato farm for this district assured period have arrested and tribunal condemned thirty vagabonds for the purpose ...”<sup>102</sup> Previous Haitian leaders hardly achieved such systematic enforcement of *corvée* and vagabondage codes in order to revive the plantation economy that was destroyed by the Haitian Revolution and subsequent insurrections. However, U.S. forces successfully reinvigorated these old codes to carryout its imperial project for “stabilizing” Haiti. In many ways, the U.S. invasion represented the convergence of post-emancipation legacies and imperialism that utilized labor codes to forcibly repress mobility and control labor.

### **Fight and Flight: Responses To Jailing and Forced Labor**

U.S. repression caused thousands to flee Haiti and others mustered an organized resistance against the U.S. repression. In the southern part of Haiti, many fled to Cuba, while inhabitants in the northern part of Haiti fled to the Dominican Republic. As the ultimate sign of resistance, many Haitians chose to regroup in the Dominican Republic and come back fighting as *caco* rebels. In total, more than one hundred thousand peasants either fought or fled from U.S. measures of control. Thus, the U.S. intervention amounted to a major migration and revolt that resembled everything but stability.

---

interrogated and heard the accused, will pronounce justice; if the arrest is substantiated, the accused will be taken and placed in one of the prisons of the arrondissement, to be later judged according to law. Art.115. Any person convicted of being a vagabond, and having served his sentence, will, never-the-less, remain under the surveillance of the police, long enough to satisfy the authorities as to his means of existence.” The Gendarmerie’s Code Rural, Box 19, folder Rural Code of Haiti, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>101</sup> Chef de La Gendarme Butler to Department Commander Gendarmerie, 21 June 1917, Box 6, folder Department of Cape, in Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>102</sup> Baker to Chief of Gendarmerie, 25 July 1917, Box 9, folder 10th Company of Gonaives, Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

In southern Haiti, U.S. officials often complained that Haitian men were suspiciously unavailable for forced labor because of migration to Cuba. In 1918, a U.S. official remarked, "In view of tremendous numbers of working men leaving for Cuba, corvée labor is difficult to obtain." The officer continued, " in one section last month we were able to get only 13 men, and we find much difficulty allthrough [*sic*] this part of the country."<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, U.S. authorities pursued a gender discriminatory policy that prevented many single women and "young girls" from migration because it was often believed that "the women of the emigrant class generally go for the purpose of prostitution alone." These assumptions of prostitution, often rooted in gendered and racialized ideas of promiscuity attached to Haitian women, prevented their migration. In fact, these gendered regulations led to a decrease in the male population, compelling women to labor for low wages. Thus, women constituted one third of the corvée labor force in southern districts.<sup>104</sup> The many reports of corvée laborers receiving no wages at all rendered it doubtful that women received anything at all.

Instead of acknowledging the oppressive conditions of the occupied Haitian state, U.S. officials blamed the migration of approximately 25,000 Haitian men to Cuba on larger economic processes related to a global shortage of labor in wartime.<sup>105</sup> Higher wages in U.S. owned sugar plantation companies, according to one report, drew thousands of Haitian men to work in Cuba. Even Haitians serving in the Gendarmerie deserted to plantations in Cuba. U.S. officials sent out orders to keep a careful watch "on passengers of all schooners to Cuba in order to apprehend any

---

<sup>103</sup> Department Commander to Chief of Gendarmerie, 4 March 1918, Box 4, folder Cayes Corresp., Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>104</sup> An undated report that mention that information was drawn from data from November 1915 by Maj.G.d.H K.E. Rockey, Box 7, *Cayes Correspondences*, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>105</sup> "...during 1917 there began an unusually large exodus which was due primarily to the effects of the War upon the Sugar industry . The Cuban Sugar Companies to take advantage of the increasing price of sugar began rapidly to extend their plantations and consequently needed a greatly increase force of labor." See an undated report that mentions that information was drawn from data from November 1915 by Maj.G.d.H K.E. Rockey, *Cayes Correspondences* in Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, Box 7, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

of the deserters.”<sup>106</sup> While written sources blamed the global economic crisis on the migration, Haitian oral sources suggest that *corvée* prompted other migration patterns.

Elderly Haitians in the southeastern zone preserved memories of the harrowing experience of coerced labor under what they called *travo piblik* or public works. The elderly Gaston Tanis remembers that her mother and father fled Jacmel because of *travo piblik* leaving behind their home, land, and other material possessions to move east seeking refuge – not in Cuba – but in the impenetrable mountainous and forested area of Thiotte. In fact she pointed out, “most people around here are not from Thiotte but are descendants of Jacmel.”<sup>107</sup> The large settlement of Thiotte likely began as a maroon refuge from U.S. forced labor and harsh penal system.

As many Haitians fled into nearby mountains and neighboring nations, others chose to stay in Haiti and fight U.S. forces. Beginning in 1917, an organized rebellion exploded onto the scene in northern Haiti. The rebels were part of an insurgent tradition culture particular to the north called *caco*. During insurrections, *cacos* wore blue denim shirts with a red kerchief tied around their neck (this insurgent dress was later appropriated by the Duvalier regime and became the official uniform of the dreaded *tonton makouts*). *Caco* insurgents constituted an underground network that organized peasant soldiers, bandits, mercenaries, and other armed elements in the countryside into a collective force led by local military leaders. *Caco* participation cut across class lines and united armed peasants. Popular traditions of revolt existed everywhere in Haiti, but its activities in the north proved much more enduring because of its underground network that stretched into the Dominican Republic.

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Also see, Department Commander to Chief of Gendarmerie, 16 October 1917, Box 7, folder Department of the South in Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Madame Gaston Tanis in Thiotte, May 2014.

In fact, *caco* insurgents were most active along the Haitian-Dominican border and drew upon relations with their Dominican insurgent counterparts called the *gavilleros* for arms and support. Some Dominicans actually joined the second wave of *caco* insurrections, including the general Yingue Lebrong who was killed by U.S. forces in the Haitian province of Mont Organise.<sup>108</sup> Other Dominicans supplied the *caco* insurgents with armed weapons. For instance, Norberto Ramirez arranged a secret meeting place in Cercadillos de las Cruzadas on the Dominican side of the border where supplies of guns and ammunitions were distributed to Haitian insurgents.<sup>109</sup> Previously unregulated, border crossings helped Haitian exiles flee U.S. arbitrary arrests and gave insurgents the opportunity to remobilize with support from Dominican allies.

During the early stages of U.S. invasion, the general and *caco* leader, Pierrelus Pierre, escaped prison and fled to the Dominican Republic. Becoming homesick, Pierre yearned to return but first wished to know which Haitians escaped detention during the *caco* insurgency. Hiding in a southeastern Dominican town of San Pedro de Macoris, Pierre and two other generals secretly sent a letter to a compatriot in Haiti, "since nearly six years we are exiled here and we want some information from you [on] who are free and we beg you to find some means to send us a few words so that we may communicate to one another and it is time, it is the hour that we be able to go back home."<sup>110</sup> Other former generals remained *caco* insurgents and utilized secret trails between the borders to obtain fresh provisions and supplies. The *caco* general Charlemagne Masséna Péralte, a Haitian of Dominican ancestry, received food and fresh

---

<sup>108</sup> Gendarmerie Intelligence Officer to Chief of the Gendarmerie, 20 October 1920, Box 4, folder Bandit Reports on June 20-May 21, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>109</sup> Chief of the Gendarmerie R.S. Hooker to Department Commander of the North, 23 April 1920, Box 4, Bandit Activities and Distribution, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>110</sup> Generals Severe Jeune, Pierrelus Pierre, and Octavien Pierre, "Sampido De Marcori," to Mr. Pétion Menard, Cap-Haitien, 14 November 1920, Box 4, folder Bandits, Reports on June 20- May 21, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

meat from an ally Dominican who owned a farm on the Haitian side of the border in Ravine Fond.<sup>111</sup> Once a former officer in the disbanded military, Péralte emerged as the leader of the *caco* revolt.

Péralte was the quintessential *caco* leader who represented the disenchanting rural military elite that felt acutely disempowered by the U.S. invasion. Péralte hailed from a prosperous peasant family in the border town of Hinche.<sup>112</sup> With a personal experience raising goats, sheep, and cattle, Péralte identified himself as a “*cultivateur*” or peasant.<sup>113</sup> Because of family’s wealth, he was also educated in the prestigious school of St. Louis de Gonzague that was located in the capital. Péralte eventually abandoned his education but decided to pursue a revolutionary life such as many of his rural contemporaries. He joined the military and involved himself in *caco* revolts that propelled him to the position of military commander. However, weeks after U.S. troops invaded Haiti, Péralte was discharged from his commanding post in Léogane and retired to his farm in Hinche. A couple of months later, U.S. forces would, again, undermine Péralte’s status as a powerful general. In 1917, U.S. soldiers arrested Péralte for organizing an insurgent attack on a prison in Hinche. Upon arrest, U.S. soldiers seized Péralte’s revolver, incinerated his home, and marched him on foot to court in the northern province of Ouanaminthe where he was

---

<sup>111</sup> Chief Gendarmerie to the Department, District and Sub-District Headquarter, no date, Box 4, Bandit Camp Sites, Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>112</sup> His mother Marie-Claire Emmanuel was a *machann* or market woman. Gaillard described Péralte’s mother Emmanuel as “*faisait le trafic entre Hinche, Maïssade et Thomonde, achetant et revendant.*” Gaillard, *écrasement*, 68 and 72. His father was the prominent general, Masséna Péralte who was the descendent of nineteenth-century Dominican migrants. Ibid, 81-87.

<sup>113</sup> Gaillard obtained personal information on the Pérales by conducting oral interviews in Hinche. Gaillard, *écrasement*, 73. On Péralte’s classification as a “*cultivateur*,” see Major Calhoun Ancrum, G.d’H to the Department of Commander, Dept. of the Cape, 27 October 1917, Box 3, Department of Cape, Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

sentenced to hard labor in Cap-Haitien.<sup>114</sup> In 1918, however, Péralte broke out of prison to become the leader of the second major *caco* revolt.

Péralte and *caco* insurgents fought against forced labor, imprisonment, and coercive policing tactics by U.S. forces that destabilized peasant communities. In a circular, Péralte declared that the insurgency was "a peasant revolt... a demand by many men who need the protection to farm [*travailler*] and live in peace." Péralte blamed the presence of U.S. gendarmes as a contributing factor which have "for nothing, condemned [peasants] to forced work, administration of slaps, kicks, punches, violating peasant women, taking by force their merchandise."<sup>115</sup> Years later, *caco* insurgents issued a declaration criticizing the U.S. penal system imposed in Haiti, "our laws tramped upon, our best citizens are despised thrown into prison without cause and no action taken, they are left to die in prisons everywhere, ladies and young girls are condemned without legal trails and left to die..."<sup>116</sup> Heeding *caco* calls to fight against U.S. repression, tens of thousands of peasants abandoned farming to join the rebellion that lasted for four years (1917-1921). The insurgency was not merely a war against U.S. incarceration, but a last defense for protecting a martial way of life that fostered freedom in the countryside.

This included the preservation of a porous border that supported peasant insurgencies and was an important factor at stake for *cacos*. The dissemination of information, supplies, and frequent border crossing compelled U.S. officers to regulate the Haitian exodus to the Dominican Republic. The insurgent culture in the northern borderland between *cacos* and Gavilleros created

---

<sup>114</sup> Gaillard, *Hinche*, 37-38. Major Calhoun Ancrum, G.d'H to the Department of Commander, 27 October 1917, Box 6, folder Department of the Cape 3, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>115</sup> Commander of Insurrectional Forces Charlemagne Masséna Péralte to Brigadier-General A. W. Caitlin, 1919, Box 5, folder Caco Correspondence, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>116</sup> The Ministers, Counselors, and Delegates of the Revolution in Northern Haiti, 1920, Box 4, folder Bandit Activities, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

solidarity that transcended national boundaries. So much so that one ethnic Haitian that lived in the borderlands region recalled, "Although there were two sides, the people were one, united."<sup>117</sup> However, the discovery of secret networks between Haitian *cacos* and Dominican *gavilleros*, prompted U.S. forces to regulate the border even more rigorously.<sup>118</sup> This restriction set in motion the first systematic attempt to control Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic under the U.S. invasion. Just only a year after U.S. invasion, one U.S. officer reported, "Forty or fifty Haitian men from the interior town daily cross frontier into San Domingo urgently recommend that old permit system reestablished to control exodus I recommend same for Ouanaminthe and Hinche."<sup>119</sup> The U.S. suppression of *caco* insurgent networks represented the real first disruption to this transnational borderland culture that supported a martial life on both sides of the border.<sup>120</sup> Now under U.S. repression, restrictions were placed on the mobility of Haitians traveling to the Dominican Republic to rearm themselves.

---

<sup>117</sup> Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, 147.

<sup>118</sup> Prior to the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, border control was a matter of state concern in the capital, but the activities of local rebels prevented border regulation. Richard Turits, "A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic" *Hispanic American Review* 82, no. 3 (August 2002) 600-601. In 1920, one U.S. officer reported, "The Dominican officials prior to the occupation in Haiti, and San Domingo, under their authorization, offered a safe refuge to the fugitive bandits in Haiti. This statement is upheld by many requests from the Marines in Haiti to those of San Domingo, particularly in the North, requesting assistance and cooperation." See, Chief Brigadier D.C. McDougal to Brigade Commander, Box 4, 20 April 1920, Border File, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC. Another U.S. officer stationed in the Dominican Republic explained to his counterpart in Haiti how cross border connections between Haitian and Dominican armed insurgents, "First means of communication between revolutionists of the East and those of this Haitian side. The communications are made personally and verbally. Norberto Ramirez has a meeting place with the Haitian revolutionists in a place called 'Los Cercadillos de las Cruzadas' where he has an old woman. This woman send the news to San Juan with the old woman "Chela" assister of the General Wenceslao Ramirez, to whom the news goes... Mr Norberto is the person who has transferred all the arms to the Haitians sent by Carmito and Aybar. Every time they need arms they come to get them via Guayabal at the ranch of Wenceslao." Chief of the Gendarmerie R.S. Hooker to Department Commander of the North, 23 April 1920, Box 4, Bandit Activities and Distribution, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC. So began U.S. attempts to stop solidarity between Haitian *cacos* and Dominican *gavilleros* by rigorously regulating the Haitian-Dominican migration on the frontier that previously lacked strict supervision. This contributed to border disputes that led to the massacre of hundred of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. See Lauren Derby, "Haitians, Magic, and Money: Raza and Society in the Haitian Borderlands, 1900 to 1937," *Comparative Study of Society and History* 36, no. 03 (July 1994) 488-526; and Turits, "A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed."

<sup>119</sup> Undated radiogram in folder records dated 1916, Box 6, folder Department of Cape, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>120</sup> See n. 97.



At home, the war placed even harsher limitations on the freedoms of Haitian insurgents and civilians alike. The U.S.-led a violent campaign in the Haitian countryside that generated more arrests, forced labor, and illegal executions of prisoners. Prisons reached maximum capacity. Stationed in the north, one U.S. officer telegraphed, "Gonaives prison overcrouded [*sic*] **stop** Cape prison filled up." More prisoners provided more labor, "they can be put to work forming there this considered an ideal arrangement."<sup>121</sup> The overcrowding of prisons, however, led to a surplus of convict labor that U.S. soldier began to casually eliminate. One U.S. officer suggested that soldiers eliminate insurgents without trial: "The orders down there were: prisons are filled; we don't want anymore prisoners." And admitted, "You may rest assured that I was relieved when I found out that I had been ordered to Port-au-Prince to be decorated for killing *cacos* and not be court-martialed for the same."<sup>122</sup> Another U.S. gendarme officer who oversaw a *corvée* detail of 3,000 later admitted during senate hearings that 400 illegal executions might have occurred.<sup>123</sup> In general, the insurgency was shockingly violent. U.S. forces took the lives of some 3,000 Haitians though estimates were likely higher.<sup>124</sup> One of the victims was Péralte himself who was ambushed and assassinated in 1919 by U.S. forces. Coupled with U.S. atrocities, insurgents also carried out their own terroristic tactics on the population.

Leaving their farms behind and carrying little provisions, roving insurgents often utilized banditry against the population to sustain themselves. Prolonged rebellion eventually cost the civilian population their farm crops and possessions that were the targets of starving insurgents. The longer the insurgents waged war, the more instances of highway robberies occurred. In

---

<sup>121</sup> J.J. Meade to Chief of Gendarmerie d'Haiti Port-au-Prince, 7 February 1919, Box 6, folder Department Cape 2, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>122</sup> Dubois, *Haiti*, 251.

<sup>123</sup> Schmidt, 104.

<sup>124</sup> Schmidt, 102-103.

January 1920, for example, U.S. officer Walter Hill wrote, "50 bandits reported robbing market women."<sup>125</sup> Taking note of these complaints, U.S. soldiers again exploited peasant fears of insurgent tactics of banditry, just as they did with initial invasion in 1915.

In 1920, U.S. officer E.A. Raymond, for example, preached to peasants that his soldiers desired to suppress "banditism" and urged the population to encourage friends and relatives to surrender. Raymond promised that those insurgents who turned themselves in could farm on their land unmolested. Raymond even released prisoners from jail as proof of U.S. sincerity. Eventually, U.S. officers throughout the northern zones began to follow Raymond's tactics of persuasion that resulted in "more than a thousand farm houses hav[ing] their men back."<sup>126</sup> The population also began to support U.S. forces in stamping out bandits. In August, insurgents struck the town of Grand Bassin, but locals helped the U.S. gendarmes fight off the insurgent attack. In April 1920, locals near Trou d'Eau mobbed a reputed *caco* named Viquena who was later shot down by U.S. soldiers.<sup>127</sup> U.S. led violent terror alongside anti-banditry propaganda compelled many starving insurgents to surrender.

Initially, U.S. officers attempted to downplay the scale of the insurgency. During senate hearings in October 1919, Major General Barnett publicly declared: "It is estimated that about 2,000 bandits infest the hills. They are under Charlemagne Peralte, who styles himself the supreme chief."<sup>128</sup> Before his death, Peralte's claimed, on the other hand, that he commanded about forty thousand followers. Indeed, secret documents corroborated Peralte's estimates. In

---

<sup>125</sup> Memorandum For the Chief of the Gendarmerie D'Haiti, 26 January 1920, Box 4, folder Bandit Activities, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington, DC.

<sup>126</sup> District Commander Raymond to Chief of Gendarmerie, 12 January 1920, folder Bandit Activities, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington, DC.

<sup>127</sup> Sub-District Commander to Headquarters Gd'H., 15 April 1920, Box 4, folder Bandit Activities, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington, DC.

<sup>128</sup> *Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo: Hearings before a select committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, Volume 1*, (United States Senate: Washington DC, 1921), 428.

September 1920, a U.S. intelligence report disclosed that a total of 43,772 Haitians surrendered.<sup>129</sup> Some months later the numbers grew; by October, 81,277 peasants surrendered.<sup>130</sup> These numbers of peasant participants reveal that the scale of the war, which was until now minimized, was actually an immense occurrence. Thus, this final defeat of the *caco* insurgents constituted a tremendous blow to traditions of revolt that protected peasant freedoms in the countryside since the Haitian Revolution. However, sources suggest that peasants were initially reluctant to surrender their arms.

U.S. officials reported a small number of arms surrendered in proportioned to the number of surrendered rebels. Barnett told U.S. senators: "I estimate that they are mostly armed with machetes, knives, pikes, a few pistols, and some 200 or 300 rifles. I don't believe that in all Haiti there are more than 400 to 500 rifles, if that many."<sup>131</sup> In reality, by 1920, about two thousand guns were captured and/or surrendered to U.S. forces. This number still remains small for a nation to be well armed and militarized. The disproportionate ratio of guns to peasants was explained by captured rebels in Lascahobas, "only chiefs and sub chiefs have them."<sup>132</sup>

Although U.S. reports do not provide a total number of guns surrendered throughout the entire time of the insurgency or occupation, scattered evidence reveals that Haitians gave up

---

<sup>129</sup> GENDARMES ACTIVITIES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NORTH FROM MAY 1919, 30 September 1920, Box 4, Bandits Reports, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>130</sup> "81,277 *bon habitants* cards were issued to Haitians who expressed willingness to be non-combatants and which served as protections against Marines and Gendarmes and population integrating against bandits." Gendarmerie Intelligence Officer to Chief of the Gendarmerie, 20 October 1920, Box 4, folder Bandit Reports on June 20-May 21, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC. Cards of "bon habitants" or "good peasant" were issued to rural denizens who surrendered after hiding in the mountains because they were either fleeing from incarceration and war, or actually fighting with insurgents. U.S. soldiers assumed that most peasants obtaining bon habitant cards were participants of the *Caco* war. When only 36000 peasants received bon habitant cards, a U.S. officer reported, "one would reasonably certain that at least 85 percent of the 36000 were active as Bandits, at one time of another during the last revolution." District Commander to Department Commander of the South, 1 June 1920, Box 4, folder Bandits Reports on June 20-May 21, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>131</sup> *Inquiry into Occupation*, 428.

<sup>132</sup> Raymond to Walter Hill, 21 January 1920, Box 4, folder Bandit Activities, Reports, Gendarmerie D'Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

hundreds of more guns by the next year. In January 1921, peasants in Gonaïves surrendered 132 rifles in the span of two weeks; in Terre Neuve and Gros Morne, 339 guns were surrendered within four weeks.<sup>133</sup> Oral sources reveal that other rebels buried their weapons that they never retrieved again. The exact number of guns surrendered remains unknown. Nonetheless, U.S. invasion successfully disarmed the countryside and the nation no longer had the potential to revolt in a serious manner. Additionally and more importantly, the vigorous enforcement of vagrancy laws stamped out opportunities for insurgent mobilization, despite false promises by U.S. forces to stop repression.



**Figure 2. Caco Rifle. During research, I photographed a *caco* rifle that was hidden from the sight of U.S. forces during the occupation. Instead, the rifle was passed down to the descendants of its original owner who live in the parish of St. Suzanne near the mountainous regions of Vallières.**

The U.S. abolished the *corvée* as a response to the *caco* insurgency, but continued to apprehend any rural male caught wondering around and charged them with *vagabondage*. The enforcement of *vagabondage* prevented mobility that was crucial to insurgent mobilization. As late as 1929 in the region of Acul, a butcher, a disabled peasant, and another crippled by yaws

---

<sup>133</sup> J.J. Meade to Chief of Gendarmerie, 3 January 1921, Box 4, Folder Bandits Reports on June 20-May21, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC. M.R. Thacher to Chief of Gendarmerie, 17 January 1921, Box 4, Folder Bandits Reports on June 20-May21, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

were all picked up for vagabondage.<sup>134</sup> Also from Acul, the minor Ganthier de Antoine was arrested for vagabondage and released in court only after explaining to the judge that he was a schoolboy and, thus, could not farm.<sup>135</sup> One Haitian newspaper revealed, "in order to repress *vagabondage* the Police are picking up all journeymen they meet along the road."<sup>136</sup> U.S. enforcement of vagrancy laws was certainly a cruel method of control but strangely seduced some peasants to report loved ones as vagabonds. On March 20, Encé Étienne was arrested for vagabondage and mentioned in court, "It is my mother that denounced me as such."<sup>137</sup> On 7 June, the accused vagabond Lorvilus Fleury also revealed in court, "It is my father who has denounced me capable of such an infraction."<sup>138</sup> Likely utilizing vagabondage to discipline their children, these peasants bought into the system that ultimately functioned to control their labor and limit mobility. In Aux Cayes, U.S. authorities reported that prisons were "rather crowded for the most part with many vagabonds and petty thieves are picked up now." So many Haitians were prosecuted as vagabonds that U.S. officials began to speak of a "vagabond class."<sup>139</sup> Disarmed and immobile, peasants lost their freedoms that were tied to traditions of popular revolt which were rooted in the Haitian Revolution. The U.S. took back those freedoms and solidified a harsh police state and penal system to detain the rebellious population. This process effectively led to stronger forms of authoritarianism in Haiti after the U.S. withdrew from Haiti.

To be sure, the U.S.-created *Gendarmerie*, which evolved into the Haitian army (*Garde Haiti*), strengthened state power in the post occupation period. But the fall of popular sovereignty

---

<sup>134</sup> On the case related to yaws, see Simple Police, 20 June 1929; on the case related to the physically disabled, see Simple Police, 6 April 1929, Tribunal de Paix (TP) de Acul-du-Nord.

<sup>135</sup> Simple Police, 25 March 1929, TP de Acul-du-Nord

<sup>136</sup> Matthew Casey, "From Haiti to Cuba and Back: Haitians' Experience of Migration, Labor, and Return, 1900-1940" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburg, 2012), 93.

<sup>137</sup> Simple Police, 20 March 1929, TP de Acul-du-Nord

<sup>138</sup> Simple Police, 7 June 1929, TP de Acul-du-Nord

<sup>139</sup> Matthew Casey, "From Haiti to Cuba and Back," 93-94.

was equally important to the making of post-occupation authoritarianism. The military's foremost responsibility was to suppress the countryside by, among other things, enforcing post-emancipation laws such as *vagabondage* that criminalized mobility. Thus, repressing the rural population was key to allowing an authoritarian state to flourish in the post-occupation period.

In the same breath, Haitian intellectuals including Jean Price-Mars – who were the scions of the demoralized rural military elite – produced a brand of nationalism that romanticized the Haitian peasantry. These pro-peasant nationalist ideas swept the nation and influenced a generation of intellectuals. A young man named François Duvalier was inspired by pro-peasant ideologies that later became the basis of his regime's populism and gave him the idea to rearm and remilitarize the rural population. Duvalier presented the creation of the militia as a restoration of the nineteenth-century martial culture and proclaimed that the *makouts* were the solution to post-emancipated crisis established by U.S. intervention.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Disempowered Peasants, the Police State, National Ideology, and the Rise of François Duvalier (1921-1962)**

In 1934, the invasion ended and U.S troops withdrew from Haiti. Peasants formed the overwhelming majority but were wholly repressed by the U.S. created military and rural police that led their exclusion from political participation. National leaders did very little to eliminate persistent forms of repression in the countryside, yet peasants became the mere focus of elite conversations regarding the state of the nation. While disempowered peasants became the central topic of national discourse, their own thoughts on repression were rarely publicized. Instead, national elites portrayed peasants as passive subjects that fully lacked a political voice to attain recourse. In reality, peasants also participated in national discourses regarding themselves.

Often victims of the military police in the countryside, peasants seeking justice sent letters of complaints to army headquarters and national leaders. Peasant wrote letters that utilized elite constructed tropes of peasant victimization to elicit sympathy and recourse from political elites. These peasant discursive actions sometimes produced justice, but often were dismissed by state officials. Nevertheless, these letters show that peasants were being politicized and actually involved in national discourses that eventually shaped the political trajectory of the nation. Duvalier, himself an active participant in pro-peasant discourses, seized upon the national

consciousness around peasant livelihoods and made their plight the focus of his 1957 presidential campaign.

Duvalier won the election and embarked on building a dictatorship that relied on violent repression but also utilized peasant-based populism to generate popular support. Duvalier's populism was rooted in concerns and discourses that transfixed elites and peasants alike since the U.S. invasion. Duvalier was particularly a self-professed *noirist* that was a strand of thought within pro-peasant discourses that partly saw peasant marginalization as a result of light-skinned elite prejudice. However, as president, Duvalier emphasized materialist inequalities.

Duvalier preached to peasants that disempowerment was the result of class exploitation and political abandonment. To remedy these inequalities, Duvalier announced his program of *justice sociale* that promised to reallocate national resources toward improving the underdeveloped conditions of the countryside and create policies aimed at eradicating class exploitation. To be sure, the loftiness of the term *justice sociale* shrouded the more nefarious aspects of the regime's violent forms of political control by almost implying that national political participation and class equality for peasants would be accomplished through just, and even democratic, means. In reality, *justice sociale* was a paternalistic authoritarian project from start to finish that linked the political liberalization of the peasantry to the gratitude of the supposed, conscionable Duvalier.

Nevertheless, *justice sociale* populism indicated to peasants the state's break from its previous urban-centered tendencies, now shifting its attention and political energies to the countryside. Whereas the central government in the post-occupation functioned as a distant authority, the Duvalier state unprecedentedly reached out to the peasantry and infused, developed, and nurtured in them, although paternalistically, the notion that the state was



responsible for their wellbeing. Indeed, the regime's discourses and policies of *justice sociale* were influential in ways that made peasants see the central state as an institution that represented their interests. For the first time since the U.S. occupation, the national state under Duvalier was pro-peasant.

However, Duvalier's peasant-based populism failed in delivering on its promises and overlooked the repressive police and penal system. Under Duvalier, peasants continued to face the same repressive laws and police abuse that were reinvigorated by the U.S. invasion. As political opposition mounted against his regime, Duvalier would turn to the age-old tradition of arming the peasantry to protect his power and present such as strategy as the solution to peasant grievances generated by the U.S. invasion that unleashed post-emancipated laws that haunted peasants ever since.

### **Turning Disempowered Peasants into *Malheureux Paysans***

U.S. repression in the countryside prompted Haitian intellectuals to construct nationalist ideas based on disempowered peasants. Haitian intellectuals witnessed mass arrests, jailing, forced labor as U.S. tactics of population control. It was in northern Haiti where a peasant-based nationalism first appeared. No small wonder since the north was most devastated by the peasant wars and U.S. repression. In her insightful article, the scholar Chelsea Stieber tells us that northern intellectuals were the actual progenitors of the "modern peasant novel," which arguably was the first intellectual experiment with peasant-based nationalism in the occupation period. These intellectuals such as Christian Werleigh, Jean-Baptiste Cinéas, Cadet Dessource, and Louis Mercier were the children of the demoralized rural military elite and peasant soldiers whose major insurgency throughout the north was violently suppressed by a U.S.-led military campaign. Branding themselves as *l'homme du nord*, these intellectuals had set out to vindicate

the defeated northern countryside through writings of fiction. They published, for example, peasant novels in the northern-based magazine *Stella* through which they were the first among Haitian intellectuals to express nostalgia for a disappearing insurgent militarized rural society that was disempowered and forced into mass migration.<sup>1</sup>

Some northern intellectuals were even victims of U.S. penal practices of repression. While traveling on horseback in the Haitian countryside near the capital in the south, Jean Price-Mars – who was a scholar, diplomat, native of the north, and had familial ties to the old rural military/insurgent elite – was arrested arbitrarily and almost impressed into a *corvée* gang.<sup>2</sup> Experiencing firsthand the U.S. project of social control, Price-Mars utilized his status as a respected statesman and intellectual to broadcast to the nation about the political and cultural marginalization of peasants. In the same year of his arrest, Price-Mars published *La vocation* that included a critique of national elites and their complicity in U.S. enforcement of force labor.<sup>3</sup> Later in 1928, he published the nationally acclaimed *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle* that denounced the elite's French-based identity and urged them to see peasants and their African-based traditions as the ideal brand for Haitian nationalism. So began a nationalist movement that saw peasants as perpetual victims of state abuse, and so began their culture as the basis of Haitian nationalism. These two dialectics shaped popular imagination during the invasion and post-invasion periods.

---

<sup>1</sup>The peasant novel produced in the north during the occupation was the first intellectual experiment with creating a brand of nationalism based on a romanticization of peasant culture. Stieber's insightful article shows that northern intellectuals were the first to write the "modern peasant novel," which was formed during the occupation. The "modern peasant novel" usually contains descriptions of migrations and discussions of a nostalgia for a militarized culture. See, Chelsea Stieber, "The Northern *Récit Paysan*: Regional Variations of the Modern Peasant Novel in Haiti," *Journal in French Studies* 70 (2016), 48, 52-54, 58.

<sup>2</sup> Gaillard cites a newspaper report and an oral interview with Price-Mars' son, among other sources, to establish this claim. Gaillard, *Hinche mise en croix*, 153.

<sup>3</sup> In a passage critical of elite complicity, Price-Mars mentions in the footnote, "*Certain jour du mois de Juillet 1918 j'ai été personnellement arrêté pour le service de la corvée.*" See, Jean Price-Mars, *La vocation d'élite* (Port-au-Prince, 1919, 40.

That is, seeing peasants as passive subjects and symbols of African-based nationalism produced a pro-peasant ideology that swept Haiti.

Urban southern intellectuals born in the capital helped popularized pro-peasant-based nationalism through their publications in the southern-based magazine *La Revue Indigene*. These writers were branded *indigéniste* that described a strand of thought which utilized ethnographic description to emphasize African-based traditions in Haiti. These *indigéniste* intellectuals usually hailed from the capital of Port-au-Prince, where U.S. rule concentrated commercial wealth and the new military power. Living in proximity to centers of commerce and power during the occupation, southern intellectual were in a position to package and elevate pro-peasant ideas to the level of nationalist discourses.

In *La Revue*, Phillip Thoby-Marcelin, a son of the urban elites classes and native of the capital, valorized peasants in his 1926 “*Sainement*.”

This morning my heart is bursting with youth,  
seething with violence.  
My cheek resting against the freshness of the dawn,  
Swearing an eternal scorn for European refinements,  
I wish henceforth to celebrate  
revolutions shootings and massacres,  
the sound of coco-macaque on black shoulders,  
the roar of the *lambi*, the mystic sensuality of voodoo;  
to celebrate in a delirium three times  
lyrical and religious.

Haitian elites began to concentrate on the peasantry that reflected the “African” (i.e., the *lambi* or the peasant conch shell flute and their African-derived religion of *vodou*) and former revolutionary potential in search to recreate a new national self. In his 1927 poem titled “*Vous*,” Carl Brouard, also an elite and native of Port-au-Prince, wrote:

You  
the destitute

the filthy  
the stinking  
peasantry [*paysanne*] who descended the mountains  
with a child in your bellies...  
you  
all the people  
stand up.<sup>4</sup>

Brouard exhortation for rural denizens to rebel against U.S.-led repression was in fact nostalgia for a repressed insurgent tradition. In addition, Brouard and Marcelin were what contemporaries described as *la génération occupation* that represented a group of Port-au-Prince-based intellectuals who were nostalgic of past revolutions. Even though the former traditions of peasant revolt were notoriously reputed for terrorizing urban life, these urban-based intellectuals constructed ideas that focused on revitalizing the disempowered peasants. Of course no longer posing an actual threat, the idea of a rebellious peasantry was now part of the urban elite's imaginary.

The young François Duvalier, at the time living in the capital and a medical student, also published pro-peasant ideas in a newspaper column that, in one case, depicted insurgent leaders as mere patriots whose “blood spilt for the defense of the ancestral country.”<sup>5</sup> However, Duvalier was not necessarily part of the *indigénisme* group of thought but another brand of nationalism called *noirisme* that stressed color tensions in Haiti. *Noirisme* was predicated on racial scientific notions that the dark-skinned elite was the most naturally suited for political leadership in Haiti because of their supposed biological link to the dark-skinned peasant masses. *Noirists* eerily found inspiration, including Duvalier, from the scientific racist writings of Arthur de Gobineau, but they simultaneously rejected conspicuous notions of eurocentrism and white racial

---

<sup>4</sup> Michael Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1916*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981), 94.

<sup>5</sup> François Duvalier, *Souvenirs d'autrefois (bric-à-brac) 1926-1948 par Abderrahman* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de L'État, 1968), 31.

superiority. *Noirists* and *indigénistes*, though differed on questions of colorisms, formed *la génération occupation* whose ideas tied peasant culture to nationalism and focused on the political marginalization of peasants.

Together, these intellectuals adopted important vernaculars to describe the plight of the peasantry. *La génération occupation* popularized the term “*paysan*” that meant peasant but infused with nationalist connotations. The French root of *paysan* refers to country and denotes both compatriot and peasant in Haiti. In Haiti, *paysan* came into vogue during the early twentieth century. Again, northern intellectuals may have been the first to popularize this term that turned peasants into symbols of nationalism. Before his assassination during the *caco* insurgency, Charlemagne Peralte employed the term “*paysan*” in his declaration of war against U.S. forces.<sup>6</sup> Northern national intellectuals such as Cinéas also began to adopt the usage of *paysan* in one of the first modern peasant novels.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, the term *paysan* grew widely popular in nationalist lexicon.

In addition, *la génération occupation* repackaged old popular the terms for the rural masses such as *malheureux pauvre misérables*. *Malheureux* and *pauvre* (unfortunate and poor), alone, were a part of many affective terms that early nineteenth-century Haitian leaders adopted to describe the freed population’s former brutalized conditions under slavery.<sup>8</sup> The term obviously carries class connotations. But during the time of U.S. invasion, these terms came to mean disempowered peasants. “*Malheureux*,” “*miserables*,” “*pauvre*” were attached to “*paysan*” and together became tropes of victimization that were in vogue among political and intellectual

---

<sup>6</sup> Commander of Insurrectional Forces Charlemagne Masséna Peralte to Brigadier-General A. W. Caitlin, 1919, Box 5, folder Caco Correspondence, Gendarmerie D’Haiti Collections, RG 127, NARA, Washington DC.

<sup>7</sup> Stieber, “The Northern *Récit Paysan*.”

<sup>8</sup> René tells us that that the 1805 Constitution described the newly freed as “*malheureux*.” See, René, “*Le Culte de l’égalité*,” 82 and 263.

elites. Often, national elites invoked these tropes to elicit sympathy for peasants subjected to a harsh police system imposed by the U.S. forces.

### **The Military-Led Police State and the *Malheureux Paysan***

Before withdrawing, U.S. forces revived a police system of control that was designed by early Haitian leaders to limit mobility in the Haitian countryside. Peasant communities formed villages called *abitasyon* or *bitasyon* (from the old French word *habitation* for plantation). The Haitian state mapped its control in the countryside by organizing clusters of *abitasyon* into geographical units labeled *section rurale* or rural section. Haiti roughly had about 500 rural sections and, beginning in the occupation period, the Haitian state appointed each section a single *chef de section* (Kr: *chef seksyon*). The *chef* in turn appointed auxiliary officers to police the several *abitasyon* constituting a single *section rurale*. Yet throughout the nineteenth-century, armed peasants resisted the sort of police enforcement that impeded on their freedom of mobility and labor. However, by the 1920s, U.S.-led forces disarmed and demilitarized peasants and made them defenseless toward the police *chefs* that functioned under the military.

The military soldiers policed towns and cities; the *police rurale*, also under military authority, policed the countryside. Even though the sole state agents in remote communities, police *chefs* relied on U.S. forces and military reinforcements located in nearby towns. Interestingly enough, isolation and sole access to state power made *chefs* immensely powerful. Furthermore, because U.S. forces neglected to provide the rural population with accountability measures for redress, peasants often encountered unchecked police brutality. On 27 April 1929, for example, a magistrate in Jacmel reported that a local rural police agent habitually “clubbed the people, [and] he was always protected by certain american officers.” Noticing the effects of the political order under U.S. control, the magistrate urged national state officials to protect the

*“malheureux... pauvres paysans.”*<sup>9</sup> The researcher could not locate other primary materials to know the outcome of this particular case. Still, although the Jacmel magistrate wrote this conscientious letter, most persons in his position were complicit in police tactics.

Vigorous policing provided the bulk of convict labor to state officials, which included magistrates, that utilized the labor for their private purposes. Thus, Haitian magistrates energetically utilized the police force to compel labor. In some cases, they did so to drive the value of labor down to make it cheaper than what peasants were willing to accept. On 12 December, the rural police arrested the peasant Petite Moucher Désir for insulting the local magistrate in the northern coastal town of Le Borgne. Court records reveal, however, that the arrest had more to do with Désir objecting to negotiations regarding the value of his labor. “I did not insult the communal Magistrate in the exercise of his function,” argued Désir to the judge, “it was for a simple observation [negotiation?] that I would do for him for the value of two gourdes which he makes we work for...him.” But the magistrate demanded that Désir work for one gourde. Désir refused the magistrate’s pittance and was arrested for “insulting” an authority figure.<sup>10</sup> Previously, peasants utilized their guns and insurgent traditions to resist state tactics of forcefully extracting labor from the rural population. However, the occupation ended egalitarian traditions of popular revolt. U.S. troops withdrew in 1934 but left a militarized police state that continued with harsh police methods of control and labor compulsion in the countryside. Put simply, legacies of the occupation persisted in the post-occupation period.

One legacy was the police enforcement of vagrancy laws. Previously a post-emancipation law that was driven to dormancy by rural revolts in the nineteenth century, vagrancy was

---

<sup>9</sup> “Il a été toujours protégé par certains officiers américains qui ajoutaient foi à toutes les défense mensongères que produisaient devant eux ce Garnier.” *Le Magistrat Communal to Monsieur le Préfet*, 27 April 1929, folder 11857, ANH, PauP.

<sup>10</sup> 1924 Simple Police, 12 December 1924, TP, Le Borgne.

reinvigorated in the occupation period to criminalize mobility and functioned to prevent insurgent mobilization in the Haitian countryside. In the post-occupation period, the army directed rural police *chefs* to continue the enforcement of vagrancy laws such as *vagabondage* or *sans aveu* (without profession). In the northern mountaintop town of Dondon, for example, the police *chefs* arrested “vagrant” peasants as *sans aveu* if they were not observed performing farm work. On 28 February 1944, the peasant Mécius Bolivard of rural section Mathador was picked up and faced *sans aveu* charges in Dondon’s court of peace. Bolivard pleaded to the judge: “I am not a *sans aveu*...I am a hard worker for SHADA (a private U.S.-owned rubber plantation).” But in a moment of respite, he travelled to the rural section Bassin Caïman to enjoy a rural pastime and suffered the consequences. “I was in a *gageure* [cockfight] at Bassin Caïman where the agent of rural police arrested me,” Bolivard told the judge. No mercy was shown; Bolivard was sentenced to three months in prison with hard labor.<sup>11</sup> In addition to restrictions on their mobility and leisure time, peasants also faced police abuses.

Thus, ordinary rural denizens were often victims of excessive police violence. In January 1948, the peasant Denise Laurent left her village in Bonbon and travelled twelve miles, either by foot or on beast, to the city of Jérémie seeking audience with the regional prefect. She complained to the prefect that two local *chefs* arrested her without just cause. The prefect agreed with her and stated in a letter of complaint to the regional commander of the army in charge of the rural police: “I cannot explain why the agents of police would behave in such a way, even if

---

<sup>11</sup> 1944 Simple Police, 28 February 1944, TP, Dondon.



Ms. Denise Laurent had been guilty of theft.”<sup>12</sup> These acts of police abuse infringed upon peasants’ sense of justice and sometimes led to their deaths.

In 1948, Joseph Mondesir, who was accused of stealing a goat in the rural section of Juanarie located on the northern central plateau, died in police custody while being escorted to prison. Mondesir’s case was posthumously investigated by the military, but the investigators ruled out foul play and blamed the death on the victim’s health issues instead. But Graveus Joseph, who was arrested along with Mondesir, mentioned to investigators that the already sickly Mondesir died after the police agent beat him with a club and whip.<sup>13</sup> As police repression persisted in the post-invasion period, so did pro-peasants discourses and ideas.

Many intellectuals portrayed the *police rurale* as autocratic and employed tropes of victimization that emphasized peasant disempowered conditions. In 1940, the ethnologist Emmanuel C. Paul published an essay in the Haitian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* that criticized the legal immunity of *chefs* that led to abuse of power. Paul remarked, “Often these *victimes nos paysan*...they lack the understanding and their distance makes their cries not always available to us.”<sup>14</sup> Assuming that peasants were entirely marginalized, Paul was suggesting that peasants lack ways for recourse. The noirists Larimer Denis and François Duvalier in their essay “*Etude sur le problème des classes a travers l’histoire d’Haiti*” also denounced, “the legendary attitude of our *chefs de section*... towards their brother *paysans* strangled by misery and ignorance.”<sup>15</sup> In his novel *Gouverneur de la rosée*, the marxist and *indigéniste* Jacques Roumain portrayed a fictional *chef* as villainously antagonistic that unlawfully jails and taxes peasants.

---

<sup>12</sup>“*Je ne m’explique pas que des agents Police puissent agir la sorte, même si Madame Denise Laurent était coupable de vol.*” Prefect George Jerome to Captain Emile Zamor, 2 February 1948 in the dossier of titled *l’agent de la police Vincent Mécène, Dossier des renvoi de militaire et de policier rural 1947-1963*, folder 11963, ANH, PauP.

<sup>13</sup>Commandant Max Chicouye to Commandant du District de Hinche, 29 April 1948, in the police dossier of Joseph Josias, folder 11973, FAd’H, ANH, PauP.

<sup>14</sup> “*Le chef de section et la classe de paysanne*,” 10 February 1941, *Le Nouvelliste*,.

<sup>15</sup> François Duvalier, *Oeuvres Essentielles*, vol.1-2, (Port-au-Prince: Presse Nationales, 1968), 304.

One of the most famous phrases in Roumain's novel employs the trope of disempowered peasants: "*Malheureux* farm in the sun and the riches are enjoyed in the shade." In another instance, the protagonist peasant Manuel decries against the rural police and penal system in Haiti and bemoans: "we are *pauvres*, it's true we are *malheureux*, it's true, we are *miserables*."<sup>16</sup> These intellectuals were alluding to the problems posed by governing a population utilizing the police to enforce repressive laws from the post-emancipation period. The intellectual conversation regarding police repression reached the heights of the national state that sometimes prompted official response.

In 1942, the newspaper *Haiti-Journal* ran a story about President Élie Lescot's plans to "open a school for training of *Chefs de Section*."<sup>17</sup> Even though the "police school" never officially opened, Lescot's gesture to reform the police showed that the national state reacted to pro-peasant discourses regarding police abuse. In addition, the central military headquarters was seemingly sensitive towards criticism about the police rurale and usually responded to complaints – though not always favorably. On 5 November 1947, after an article in the newspaper *Le Rempart* described an unlawful imprisonment of a peasant by a *chef* in Aux Cayes. A military investigation was immediately opened. However, the investigation report dismissed the details of the newspaper article as mendacious.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the article had the rapid effect of triggering official response due to the national influence of pro-peasant discourses. And although marginalized, peasants also took notice to these discourses and participated in elite conversations regarding police abuse and employed its vernacular to prompt state action.

---

<sup>16</sup> See, Jacques Roumain, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (edition Le Temps des Cerises, 1944), 45 and 71-72.

<sup>17</sup> Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 2011), 341(n61).

<sup>18</sup> Commandant du Sous-District to District des Cayes, 18 November 1947, in dossier *L'agent de la police Pierre Booz, Dossiers de carrier militaire des agents de polices rurales* (1947-1955), folder 11989, FAd'H, ANH, PauP.

\*\*\*\*\*

In 1948, the peasant named Pyrra Dimanche of Kenscoff sent a letter to the central military headquarters in the capital that supervised the rural police. “*Grand Général*, the only reassurance that a *pauvre malheureux* of the countryside can have is to know that justice, even its enjoyment in the countryside, reigns in your bureau,” declared Dimanche. His letter described how a search for his missing calf led to his own arrest by the local *chef de section* named Saint-Rilus Solius. Dimanche complained that he spent two days in jail under “the worst treatment” and was finally released after paying *chef* Solius a bribe. “*Voilà général*,” Dimanche bemoaned, “how a *pauvre paysan* is taxed to live under the caprice of the *chef de section*.” Dimanche could have been a “poor peasant” but this last phrase and others that appear in the letter seemed borrowed from political elite tropes of pilfering rural policemen living off helpless peasants through jailing and unjust taxation. Dimanche identified himself as “*un pauvre malheureux*” and “*paysan*” which were twentieth-century labels that political elites had popularized to emphasize peasants disempowered conditions. In reality, “*cultivateur*,” “*habitant*,” “*habitant cultivateur*,” or “*habitant propriétaire* (for mid-sized landowning peasants),” were official categories for peasants. Thus, when *paysan* appeared in official records, it usually was done so to elicit political sympathy for the peasantry. This explains why Dimanche avoided the more euphemistic “*cultivateur*” and, instead, emphasized his special citizenship as a “*paysan*” to make claims on the state.<sup>19</sup>

Dimanche’s letter seemed to have produced some justice but inadvertently. It underwent the tortuous process of being officially discredited before action was taken against *chef* Solius.

---

<sup>19</sup> Monsieur Pyrra Dimanche to Grand Générale du Quartier General de Port-au-Prince, 8 June 1948; found in the folder titled *L’agent de la police Saint-Rilus Solius, Dossiers de carrier militaire des agents de polices rurales* (1947-1955), folder 11989, FAd’H, ANH, PauP.

The letter, as Dimanche intended, was forwarded to the highest level of the military hierarchy (*Chef d'Etat-Major Général*) and an investigation was ordered. But the investigatory report conclude that Dimanche was a “professional thief” who lacked “morality.” The report also dismissed his letter as a “tissue of lies.” Nevertheless, the Dimanche’s letter drew the attention of the military hierarchy to his case that compelled the army to recommend that *chef* Solius be jailed for neglecting to follow appropriate procedures concerning Dimanche’s arrest. Six months later Solius’ military contract expired without being approved for reenlistment; his character was labeled, “MAUVAIS.”<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 3. *Chef de section*. Image of *chef* Rilus Solius**<sup>21</sup>

Before the U.S. occupation, peasants would turn to insurgency and revolt to address abuses. In the post-occupation period, however, peasants learned from intellectual and national discourses to look to Port-au-Prince for political sympathy and official redress. On 10 June 1952, the peasant Emmanuel “Emmanus” Jolicoeur sent a letter to President General Paul Magloire regarding a complaint against a local *chef*. “Permit me to disturb you for a moment in your multiple occupations to demand you cast a completely paternal regard on my sad situation which was done to a *pauvre paysan*,” declared Emmanus. In the letter, Emmanus described how he

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

was the victim of an egregious plot organized by local land surveyors and court officials, by whom he referred to as *homme de sac et de corde* (French for brigands), to dispossess him of land he recently purchased in the neighboring region of Léogane. They had him arrested in Léogane where he spent three tortured nights in prison. Emmanus was later transferred to a prison in Petit Goâve further away from home. He was transferred by *chef* Lorméguy Espérance who beat and mistreated him on the road leaving him with a laceration above one eye. Emmanus pleaded in his letter, “It cannot be that under the all humane Government of your Excellence Paul E. Magloire, reigning in all its beauty, [this] malice and injustice.” He concluded the letter by employing tropes of victimization, “it is persuaded by the spirit of social justice, of the solicitude of all paternal of Your Government, that this *pauvre* citizen lost in the remote corners... you come to listen to my feeble voice.” Emmanus’s letter of complaint reached President Magloire whose secretary forwarded the complaint to the general of the military whereby an investigation was initiated. But the road to justice was tortuous and often endless. Unfortunately, the military investigation discredited Emmanus’s claims and no action was taken against *chef* Lorméguy. This instance and others demonstrate the deployment of pro-peasant political ideology by intellectuals, state officials, and peasants as a way of defending their respective interests and in the process building a national consciousness regarding the welfare of the peasantry. However, these concerns were not converted into political reforms that improved the conditions of peasants.

Throughout the post-invasion period, state expenditures on agriculture never exceeded five percent while coffee, the peasant’s chief cash crop, faced stiff competition on the global market.<sup>22</sup> The state’s investment in agriculture was negligible in comparison to its expenditures

---

<sup>22</sup> See charts on expenditures in Lundalh, *Peasants and Poverty*, 304-306.

that went to the small U.S. created military and state bureaucrats which together consumed more than half of the state's budget.<sup>23</sup> Often, the very political elites who espoused pro-peasant discourses were beneficiaries of structural inequalities. One judge of peace in the northern town of Acul-du-Nord sworn not to assist local state agents in tax collection because his duties involved the "protection for the *masse paysanne*." But the tax agent revealed in a letter that the Acul judge was merely appropriating the nationalist discourses to avoid paying two year's worth of back taxes on his own property.<sup>24</sup> Despite much talk about peasant rights among political and intellectual elites, abuses continued as the rural population began to form a fully disempowered class. These discourses rarely became into the chief concerns of the central government and were subordinate to urban planning and modernization. However, Duvalier ran for president in 1957 and made pro-peasant discourses the basis of his presidential campaign.

### **Duvalier's *Justice Sociale***

In 1907, François Duvalier was born into an urban family of modest means. His father Duval Duvalier was a judge of peace and his mother was a baker. The young Duvalier came of age during the U.S. invasion and was shaped by the pro-peasant discourses of the moment. By the time U.S. troops withdrew in 1934, Duvalier regularly published opinions in newspapers that covered topics heavily focused on peasant marginalization and urban-based prejudice toward the rural population. In addition, Duvalier's professional occupations as a country doctor familiarized him with the countryside.

Many elderly peasants living in inaccessible villages recall that the young Duvalier, whom they referred to as "Papa Doc," worked in local medical centers to give *piki* (Fr: *piqûre*) or

---

<sup>23</sup> Lundalh, 379-385.

<sup>24</sup> Préposé des Contributions to Collecteur des Contributions Cap-Haitien, 9 April 1947, Folder Letter rel. Chef Section '46, DGI/Impôts Locale, Acul-du-Nord.

vaccinations. From the dry isolated northern region of Lacoma to the southern reclusive mountaintop village of Mackary near the coastal town of Jacmel, peasants recalled Duvalier curing them of *pyan* (Fr: *pian*) or yaws that made rural life exasperating. Duvalier's engagement with pro-peasant discourses and his personal interactions with rural denizens shaped his early understanding of rural life. But Duvalier's *noirist* writings brought him national attention.

Duvalier and other *noirists* represented the views of a disaffected urban black bourgeoisie that criticized mulatto elites for political inequalities in Haiti. "How to explain since 1804, the black class though the majority has been dominated by the minority?" inquired Duvalier in a 1948 weekly column.<sup>25</sup> However, *noirists* rarely articulated a clear vision that would facilitate peasant integration into national politics. Instead, *noirists* looked upon the rural masses as mere benefactors of the political success of the black elite. Yet when he ran for president in 1957, Duvalier's *noirist* views were overshadowed by a class-based populism that he branded *justice sociale* which emphasized the plight of the peasantry.<sup>26</sup>

During his presidential campaign, Duvalier travelled throughout the provinces and espoused pro-peasant ideas that class inequalities and political abandonment of the Haitian countryside, rather than color divisions, were the chief causes of peasant poverty. Duvalier laid out plans to achieve what he branded *justice sociale*. With a particular focus on improving material conditions in the countryside, Duvalier traveled around the country to spell out his program of *justice sociale*. He preached the expansion of irrigation and rural education in

---

<sup>25</sup> Duvalier, *Souvenirs d'autrefois*, 119.

<sup>26</sup> *Noirists* eerily found inspiration, including Duvalier, from the scientific racist writings of Arthur de Gobineau, but simultaneously rejected conspicuous notions of eurocentrism and white racial supremacy. In addition, *noirists* often disagreed with Haitian Marxists' emphasis on the prevailing role of class exploitation as a function of political inequality. Still, they did possess some criticisms of class inequality but was shaped by the notion that the political marginalization of the dark-skinned masses was the product of color prejudice by the traditional light-skinned elite who remained politically supreme in a zero-sum color conflict. Furthermore, *noirisme* looked upon the peasants as mere benefactors of the political success of the dark-skinned elite, but rarely articulated peasant integration into national politics. Thus, conceptually, *noirisme* continued to distance the peasantry from central politics.

Arcahaie; reforestation and reduction of land and irrigation taxes to which Artibonite peasants were subjected; the revival of banana agriculture in Grand Goâve; the end of “feudalism” in Léogane; the realization of a twenty-thousand hectare irrigation system in the plains of Port-de-Paix and Moustiques; and so on.<sup>27</sup> Duvalier’s notion of *justice sociale* resembled more like the ideas of the marxist Roumain whose own novel *Gouverneur* concluded with the installation of an irrigation system to improve farming for beleaguered peasants. In fact, as we shall see, Duvalier would complete the construction of the largest peasant-based irrigation system in Haiti. Thus, for reasons yet unknown, Duvalier’s *noirist* views dissipated during his presidential campaign and gave way to the class-based populism of *justice sociale*.

Leaving *noirisme* behind on the campaign trail, Duvalier speeches emphasized class divisions produced by elite exploitation. In the province city of Gonaïves on 23 December 1956, Duvalier decried, “I always fought against the exploitation of workers and peasants.”<sup>28</sup> On 19 March 1957, Duvalier proclaimed to an audience in Port-de-Paix, “I dream that the provinces of my country, still abandoned, oscillating between material and moral desolation, a destiny of development which will permit each person, man of the Rural Section like the city-dweller put in words his tragedy and rediscover, with determined work, the indomitable energy which creates and maintains the confidence in oneself.”<sup>29</sup> Rival presidential candidates also included the peasantry into their discourses, but not with the same focus on social and class-based issues.

The other presidential candidates were technocratic in their approaches. Hailing from a family of landed elites, Clement Jumelle studied economics at the University of Chicago and was exposed to U.S.-based theories of development. Jumelle centered his political platform on the

---

<sup>27</sup> Duvalier, *Oeuvres Essentielles*, 32, 96, 98, and 115.

<sup>28</sup> Duvalier, *Oeuvres Essentielles*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Duvalier, *Oeuvres Essentielles*, 139.



need for increase technical expertise in Haiti. Louis Dejoie, a large landowner and former senator, focused on the development of the commercial agribusiness. Dejoie would become a serious contender for the presidency.

Dejoie was an influential politician, but opponents exploited his ties to the commercial elite. For example, Dejoie's campaign slogan aimed to revitalized agriculture, but was purposefully misinterpreted by rivals as urban condescension toward peasants: "the return to the farms."<sup>30</sup> Whether true or not, Duvalier sought to take advantage of speculations regarding the urban elitism of some of his rivals by portraying himself as the candidate who, supposedly unlike the other candidates, embraced the significance of peasant participation in the election. On 17 September 1957, Duvalier declared to an audience of peasants in the Artibonite, "My adversaries have reason...I am rural in a nation where 90% of the population is rural."<sup>31</sup> In September, the elections drew results that reflected the efforts of Duvalier's rural-based campaigns: Duvalier lost the vote in the capital of Port-au-Prince (Duvalier, 6,443 votes; Dejoie 10,596 votes), but won the majority in the provinces.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Duvalier's presidential victory was also the product of internal military conflict.

The elections fractured the U.S.-created military into groups that supported various presidential candidates. This led to scattered street battles between military factions. The most significant example was the May 25 crisis where Colonel Pierre Armand and his forces, which were supporters of Dejoie, besieged the military headquarters in the capital held by General Léon Cantave who was posturing to take power for himself. Rumors only explain how the crisis came

---

<sup>30</sup> Leslie F. Manigat, *Haiti of the Sixties Object of International concern (a tentative global analysis of the potentially explosive situation of a crisis country in the Caribbean)*, Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research (1964), 43.

<sup>31</sup> "Grand Succès du Docteur Duvalier dans l'Artibonite," 17 September 1957, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>32</sup> "Les premiers résultats des élections du 22," 22 September 1957, *Le Nouvelliste*.

to a close, but Armand was unsuccessful and Déjoie's chances of winning the election waned. Cantave was also traumatized by the event and, soon after, fled to Miami. The elections completely divided the military that created an opportunity for Duvalier. One historian observes, "the biggest loser of May 25<sup>th</sup> was the Haitian army...Soldiers had taken up arms against soldiers, officers against officers. The military had become completely politicized and was now, more than ever before, susceptible to pressure and influence from presidential candidates. It would pay for this weakness."<sup>33</sup> Military factions eliminated each other and cleared the way for officers who supported Duvalier to secure his path to power. Thus, the role of the fractious military in the rise of the Duvalier dictatorship was disjointed and inadvertent.

Déjoie, Jumelle, and other rivals, who also had connections in the army, alleged that the pro-Duvalier military faction rigged the elections, but a lack of evidence makes it difficult to verify these charges. If the elections revealed anything, it was that Duvalier's rural-based campaign foreshadowed how the regime would rely on the rural population, as much as trusted elements within the military, to consolidate power. This political approach brought Duvalier into power and eventually sustained his repressive regime.

François Duvalier took office in October 1957 and soon utilized force to eliminate political opposition. In December 1957, for example, Duvalier modified the constitution to outlaw strikes by government employees and to suppress the previous intractable tendencies of the Haitian senate.<sup>34</sup> Newspapers critical of the regime were forced out of print, hundreds of supposed dissidents were locked up, and the boldest of dissenters were greeted with utter state brutality. One of the most gruesome examples of the last point was illustrated in 1958 when

---

<sup>33</sup> Christian Alcindor, "U.S.-Haiti Relations From 1957 to 1963: Anticommunism, Nation-Building, and Radical Diplomacy in the Age of National Liberation" (dissertation PhD, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. 2002), 61.

<sup>34</sup> Alcindor, "U.S.-Haiti Relations From 1957 to 1963," 158-159.

secret state agents kidnapped and sexually assaulted the feminist writer Yvonne Hakim-Rimpel after she criticized the regime. Already in its infancy, the Duvalier state showed signs of brutal political intolerance.

Yet as Duvalier government violently repressed the political opposition, pro-peasant populism formed the public discourse of the regime. In May 1958, during one of his many organized peasant rallies in the capital of Port-au-Prince, Duvalier declared to a “*Congrès*” of rural denizens: “The evolution of the peasant... by being totally conscious, accelerates the rise to citizenship.” Duvalier added that this rally was not held simply for the present rural audience to talk about their agricultural production, but for the “producers themselves” to “recount their frustrations, decry their miseries, and denounce [*stigmatiser*] the cruelty of city people and the behavior of intermediary merchants.” He declared that his new government, “is the triumph of the peasant and worker; it marks the end of artificial demarcations and it announces the anticipated moment, that is to say the liberation of the Haitian Man by the liquidation of forms of moral and material oppression.”<sup>35</sup>

His speeches were the culmination of pro-peasant conversations developed since the U.S. invasion and came to define the regime. Duvalier harped on the point regarding improving peasant material conditions. On 1 May 1958, he promised “A new rise of consciousness... to achieve the fight of production, the fight of conserving the growth of resources and assuring to

---

<sup>35</sup>“ *L'évolution du paysan... par une prise de conscience totale, accélère cette accession à la citoyenneté... La réalisation de ce Congrès ne consacre pas le verbalisme creux des tirades sur la production. C'est le producteur lui-même qui vient dire son expérience, raconter ses déboires, décrire ses misères et stigmatiser la férocité de l'homme des villes ou le comportement des intermédiaires.* ” “...il est le triomphe du paysan et l'ouvrier; il marque la fin des démarcations artificielles et il annonce les temps attendus, c'est-à-dire la libération de l'Homme haïtien par la liquidation des formes d'oppression morale et matérielle.” Docteur François Duvalier, *Oeuvres Essentielles Vol. III, La révolution au pouvoir*. Port-au-Prince, 1967, 63.

the peasants and workers a distribution of revenues, quite equitable, quite humane.”<sup>36</sup> “This election was the victory of the *miserables masse paysan* who henceforth would be assured a fair and equitable share of national revenue,” Duvalier announced in another speech.<sup>37</sup>

Posturing as the national leader of peasants, Duvalier also interwove his populism with political repression. For example, the Duvalier regime expropriated the estates of his political rivals and redistributed them to peasants. On 15 October 1957, the Duvalier regime nationalized the properties of the former president Paul E. Magloire and his family.<sup>38</sup> The six hundred acre estate of Arsène Magloire in the irrigated valley of Artibonite was subdivided and transferred to a state-sponsored peasant association comprising 125 members.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, the regime did not redistribute all of the Magloire estate, but peasants squatted on what was left regardless. For instance, Duvalier ordered Magloire’s two hundred-twenty nine-acre plantation in abitasyon Balan of Quartier Morin to be resold for state revenue. However, according to local oral tradition, Balan peasants “*pwan’y pou piyay*” or “took it for free.”<sup>40</sup> Peasants squatting on nationalized land prevented the regime from economically exploiting land seizures reveals the

---

<sup>36</sup> “Une nouvelle prise de conscience des difficultés à vaincre pour gagner la bataille de la production, la bataille de conservation de l’accroissement des ressources et assurer au paysan et à l’ouvrier une distribution de revenus plus équitable, plus humaine.” Duvalier, 157. As we have seen, Duvalier occasionally mentioned the Haitian proletariat in speeches, but the number of workers was negligible in Haiti. Furthermore, wage labor included agriculture workers who also farmed on their own lots. Duvalier’s populism was centered on improving peasant material conditions.

<sup>37</sup> “Cette élection c’était la victoire de nos misérables masses paysannes pour qui se trouverait désormais assuré une part juste et équitable du revenu national.” Duvalier, *Oeuvres Essentielles Vol. III*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> AMEmbassy, Port-Au-Prince to The Department of State, 31 December 1956, 8.38.16/12-3156, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland; “Enquête à Desdunes Grand Place,” 17 June 1961, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>39</sup> In the 1970s, Arsène’s former land remained in legal dispute between elites and peasants. It may have been that after François Duvalier died former claimants to the nationalized land were seeking to recover it under Jean-Claude Duvalier. See, Max Belot to Juge de Paix du Quartier Desdunes, 4 January 1972, (letter can be found folded in the 1971 *Interrogatoire* at the) Tribunal de Paix in the commune of Desdunes, Artibonite Department. Even after the fall of the Duvalier regime, this land was still the object of violent dispute. See, the report “*LES CONFLITS TERRIENS SUR L’HABITATION ACCUEIL, DESDUNES*,” ODVA in Pont Sonde.

<sup>40</sup> On official directives to local officials to seize Magloire land in Quartier Morin, see, Procès-verbal le prise de possession des 72 carreaux de terre de sieur Arsène Magloire, 7 November 1957, Tribunal de Paix in the commune of Quartier Morin, Northern Department. On official directives to resell land in Balan see, *Collecteur des Contributions to Préposé des Contributions de Quartier Morin*, 5 November 1957, *DGI-Impôts Locatif*, Quartier Morin. On local information regarding local squatting on Balan, Interview with Louis Nicolas in *habitation Galmant du Plat*, Quartier Morin, 23 May 2015.

state limitations on how to control the whirlwind of its own populism. Nevertheless, the state continued the practice of taking land from political enemies and giving them to peasants.

On 23 November 1958, the regime nationalized Dejoie's 1,235 acre estate in the offshore island Ile a Vache (about 20 square miles or 12,800 hectares large) and subdivided it among three-hundred peasants, each given a minimum of five hectares when the average peasant plot in Haiti was no larger than one hectare. The Duvalier state publicly expressed that its decree was an act to bring about social equity that would “ameliorate the deplorable life conditions of the rural population.”<sup>41</sup> Not much information could be found to elucidate how the redistribution process was administered and to determine whether it was conducted in an equitable manner.

But recent news from Ile à Vache confirms that peasants actually were given land by Duvalier. In 2013, Haitian President Michel Martelly, who fashioned himself as a neo-Duvalierist and a strong-man political leader, attempted to dispossess peasants in Ile à Vache to build ecotourist resorts on peasant farms. In so doing, however, President Martelly confronted the populist legacies of the Duvalier regime revealed to him by peasant claims that their land was gifted to them by Duvalier himself. One news source has opined on this curious irony:

All this, for the sake of ‘ecotourism’ and without any consultation with 20,000 islanders, many of whom hold rural grants of their properties and farming rights from the State, as well as various leases. Interestingly, it was François Duvalier who distributed some 2,500 acres [this number is higher than what was reported in my primary sources] of Ile a Vache lands to the population in 1957 after wresting them from a Senator called Louis Desjoies [sic], who had treated the island as his private fiefdom. Thus this recent move by the Martelly... regime to reverse this bit of Duvalierist agrarian reform could be regarded as a sort of Duvalierism with all the dictatorial tactics but none the resources of nationalism.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> “Commission Formed to Distribute 500 Hectares of Ile A VACHE,” *Haiti Sun*, January 17, 1959. “*Distribution de Terres aux Paysans de l’Ille à Vache*,” 1958, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>42</sup> “Widespread Abuse and Police Brutality in Haiti’s Ile à Vache” 24 July 2014, *Counter Punch*, [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org).

What the journalist describes as nationalism was more likely part of *justice sociale* populism that integrated repression and peasant interests to buttress the power of the regime. In this way, populism was as significant as a tool of establishing the regime's hegemony by having the double effect of weakening the opposition while deepening peasant's loyalty to the regime.

Often in the literature, however, the regime's ideology has been presented as a *noirist* brand of fascism. *Noirisme* and its particular emphasis on the call for black elites to achieve political supremacy can be rarely, if at all, found in most of Duvalier's recorded presidential speeches. The same cannot be said for local regime loyalists. For example, Wilfred Siméon, the minister of interior and later magistrate of Jérémie, gave speeches that alluded to color conflict as the preeminent political problem of the nation and saw Duvalier as the leader who would unshackle the dominance of the mulatto elite.<sup>43</sup> Duvalier as president, on the other hand, had rarely been recorded espousing *noirist* ideology. On the contrary Duvalier endorsed color unity. One U.S. journalist recounted how president Duvalier alluded to his commitment to reflect the colors in the Haitian flag that symbolize the union between the dark-skinned and light skinned Haitians. "I am neither the red nor the blue but the indivisible bicolor of the Haitian people,"

---

<sup>43</sup> In a speech in Jérémie on 22 September 1957 praising Duvalier's election victory, Siméon called for unity between dark-skinned and light-skinned Haitians, "*c'était enfin le triomphe de la rénovation nationale dans l'union des Fils de la Patrie, noir et jaune qui nous créa le bicolore Noir et rouge qui nous a valu l'Épopée fulgurant de Vertières, la geste Immortelle de 1804.*" But his speech alluded to disrupting the hegemony of the light-skinned traditional elite, "*Ils ignorant cependant que la réaction d'une petite clique de monarques déchus, inconsolés, fatigues de contempler à leurs pieds les débris de leur couronne et qui manigancent dans l'ombre pour conquérir le trône.*" Wilfred asserted that the Duvalier rule was not going to be similar to dark-skinned puppet presidents under the control of the light-skinned elite, "*...le Président Duvalier noble pauvre de la classe refuse de servir de doublure...*" See, 22 September in untitled folder, Wilfred Siméon Private Collection. Still, color tensions may have been comparably more acute in Jérémie which manifested in one the most bloody massacres in Haitian history. A group of exiled Haitian men in the U.S. who hailed from Jérémie's light-skinned elite families organized a rebel group called *Jeune Haiti* who in 1964 launched an attack in the interior near the city of Jérémie. The rebellion was suppressed and the local agents of the regime executed a number of the light-skinned elite families in Jérémie.

asserted Duvalier.<sup>44</sup> As we shall see, the regime's central ideology would eventually change into something more racially conscious, but this would come after his populist project failed.

### **Pro-Peasant Populism in Haiti and the Artibonite Irrigation Project**

Between 1957 and 1962, the regime focused on certain agricultural projects that were partly administered and financially supported by U.S. development agencies. The Duvalier regime relied on U.S. assistance to realize *justice sociale*. The projects were portrayed as beneficial to the peasantry but also seemed motivated by the regime's desires to augment the national economy that relied heavily on peasant production. Duvalier's request for U.S. assistance for the construction of roads, wharfs, state-owned sugar mills, and an international airport suggests his goals to improve the internal circulation and export of peasant-grown commodities. That is to say, these projects were not merely intended to generate support among peasants but also sought to develop an already market-oriented peasant economy that was fully integrated into the national economy and heavily taxed by the state. Contrary to generalized representations of subsistence farmers simply growing their meals for immediate consumption, the peasant mode of existence in Haiti was primarily based on producing commodities that peasant women shuttled to public markets where they sold off their agricultural production in exchange for cash utilized to buy food not locally grown, pay medical bills, reluctantly contribute to tax, purchase properties, make offerings to the ancestral spirits and saints, and so on. Since the tax bureau was created during the U.S. occupation, the state strove to regulate this economy by taxing the circulation of commodities and money in every way it could and, thus, an

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

improvement of rural infrastructure and the underdeveloped peasant market-based economy would logically augment state revenue and strengthen its control over the peasant economy.<sup>45</sup>

The most significant development project was the expansion of irrigation in the Artibonite valley that had already been underway for eighteen years prior to Duvalier taking office, but the project remained wholly incomplete.<sup>46</sup> In 1949, President Dumarsais Estimé and Haitian agricultural experts drew up plans to integrate small U.S. built gravity irrigations into a larger system extending throughout the Artibonite valley and requested U.S. technical expertise and monetary funding. The U.S. and the Haitian governments agreed to form an autonomous administrative body called *Organisme de Développement de la Vallée de l'Artibonite (ODVA)* that governed the irrigation project. ODVA comprised U.S. and Haitian officials that represented the joint efforts and interests of the respective governments. The Haitian government appointed the ODVA director while most important financial positions were reserved for U.S. officials. In 1950, the ODVA project was stalled after Estimé was overthrown by a military coup led by General Paul Magloire who succeeded to the presidency. The construction of the dam and

---

<sup>45</sup> Peasants (mainly women) vended and, thus, contributed crops and non-crop-based commodities into an extensive market network that responded to pressures of supply and demand. Peasant market women *machann* or *madam sara* bought, sold, and transported commodities to and from local markets that formed an extensive market network that carried commodities to wherever they were demanded—all of which the state (inefficiently) monitored for taxation. Peasants also grew exported commodities such as coffee and cocoa which were indirectly taxed passing through customhouses.

<sup>46</sup> George F. Freeman, "Report on the soil survey of the Artibonite Plain: an investigation of the psychical and chemical properties of the soils, the occurrence and composition of alkali, of the climate, and of the native vegetation, crops, and agricultural practices of the region," Service Technique of the Department of Agriculture and Vocational Education, 1926, Port-au-Prince. In fact, many of the irrigations projects, sites of older colonial waterway systems near ruins of former plantations, that Duvalier undertook were legacies of the occupation. Since independence, agriculture in terms of a technical development had been associated with the plantation economy. When the peasant economy prevailed, the Haitian state abandoned technical assistance to small farming leaving the majority of the rural masses to toil the soil with simply the primitive tools such as machetes. The Agriculture Department seemed to be more concerned with the surveillance of labor than technical development which explains why the Agriculture and Public Works (*Travaux Public*) were combined into the one institution throughout the nineteenth-century. During U.S. intervention, a new building was built for agricultural, detaching it from the Travaux Public but this seemed to have attached agricultural development to U.S. financial support ever since. One economic study on Haiti demonstrates that the Agriculture department never received annually more than 8% of state expenditures in a country predominately agrarian, leaving the financial support of agricultural development to U.S. aid. See, Lundalh, 303-317. Most of state revenue, more than half, went to state employees and the Haitian army that only contributed to urbanization of central politics; see, Lundalh, 379-386.



irrigation system resumed in 1952 and plans were devised to expand the system to include 33,000 hectares of land. However by 1955, even though the U.S. government expended three million dollars towards irrigation construction, only 4,000 hectares of land were irrigated.<sup>47</sup> In 1956, the Magloire government fell from power in the face of urban-based popular unrest. Substantial irrigation expansion occurred after the fall of the Magloire government. From 1955 into the first two years of the Duvalier government, construction continued, brining the irrigation to cover some 20,000 acres in the Artibonite. Ever since the U.S. occupation, the Haitian state outsourced agricultural development to U.S agencies and Duvalier continued with this practice to support the materialist side of his pro-peasant populism.

Duvalier turned to the U.S. for loans and grants to support what would become the largest irrigation system in Haiti that was being constructed in the Artibonite valley. His hopes of receiving assistance followed the recent creation of Eisenhower's Development Loan Fund, passed in 1957 that provided Third World countries with low interest loans for development projects. Duvalier spoke optimistically about the prospects of U.S. aid. During an interview with a *New York Times*' reporter, Duvalier admitted that similarly to Puerto Rico whose economic progress was attributed to U.S. assistance, he also wanted Haiti to become "the spoiled child with the of American capital."<sup>48</sup>

Early U.S. assistance, however, was delayed by, among other issues, U.S. concerns regarding Haiti's defaults on foreign obligations amounting to a 2.7 million deficit and by a pending case involving the murder of the U.S. citizen Shibley Talamas in the custody of Haitian

---

<sup>47</sup> "SCIPA Complete Review Years of Work in Haiti 1955," RG 286, Central Decimal Files: 1962-963, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>48</sup> Alcindor, 74.

authorities.<sup>49</sup> For U.S. officials, the case was satisfactorily resolved with Talamas's wife restituted \$100,000 from the Duvalier state and demoted and discharged authorities complicit in Talamas's murder.<sup>50</sup> Aid began to trickle in as well, but the regime had to convince Washington of economic efficiency. The Duvalier state immediately pursued rigorous austerity measures to cut down on public spending and to reduce state operating costs by 10%. A sudden (yet short lived) peasant-produced coffee boom in exports between 1957-59 contributed to efforts to raise state revenue. By fall 1958, according to a U.S. economic report, the Duvalier regime generated a 2.6 million surplus.<sup>51</sup> In his second inaugural address on 22 October 1958, Duvalier thanked Haitians for bearing the brunt of taxation in order to pay off foreign debt.<sup>52</sup> Duvalier in the same speech announced to the public that his next step was "to appeal to foreign capital."<sup>53</sup> After meeting austerity conditions to receive aid, U.S. began releasing large amounts of money in the form of grants and loans to the Haitian government in support of agricultural development projects.

Previously, Haiti received the least amount of U.S. financial investments in the Caribbean and Latin America. In 1955, for example, the U.S. gave Haiti \$18 million; whereas the Dominican Republic received \$134 million; Panama, \$479 million; and Cuba, \$723 million.<sup>54</sup> Finally, for the completion of the Artibonite irrigation project, the U.S. released unprecedented amounts money to the Haitian government under Duvalier. The construction of the Artibonite

---

<sup>49</sup> AMEmbassy Port-au-Prince, Haiti to The Department of State, 9 January 1958, 838.00/1-958, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>50</sup> Alcindor, 82

<sup>51</sup> AMEmbassy Port-au-Prince, Haiti to The Department of State, 9 January 1958, 838.00/1-958, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>52</sup> Duvalier, 110.

<sup>53</sup> "...dans la mesure où les intérêts nationaux le permettraient Mon Gouvernement a fait appel aux capitaux étrangers." Duvalier, 110-111.

<sup>54</sup> Alcindor, 70.

irrigation system was promoted as a *justice sociale* project that aimed to distribute water to small farms owned by peasants throughout the previously arid valley.

\*\*\*\*\*

Aside from propping the agricultural economy, the regime intended the Artibonite irrigation project to generate local peasant support for Duvalier. In June 1958, Duvalier visited the Artibonite valley where he declared to local peasants, “I do not give the right to anyone...my accession to this position of Chief of State. I remain, above all, the President of the Backcountry.”<sup>55</sup> The construction of the irrigation system was certainly tied to the regime’s propagandistic programs that aimed convey to peasants that the regime was the guarantor of political, social, and economic opportunities for Artibonite peasants. Duvalier himself strove to reinforce this brand of populist paternalism. A glance at the monthly prefecture briefings illustrate how the regime held rallies in the countryside to inculcate the peasantry with state populism and official ideology that were in nature quite paternalistic but promoted *justice sociale*:

13 October 1958: Meeting organized in Pont Benoit by the Prefect Aubin and the Communal Magistrate of the Petite Rivière de l’Artibonite, Emile Jean François. Fight against abuse. Creation of Literacy Center...

13 October 1958: Steps by the Prosecutors Office next to the Civil Court of Saint Marc against the abuse whose victims are certain paysans of my Jurisdiction...

21 October 1958: Visit to Desdunes and meeting...AIM OF MEETING: Definition of Duvalierism. Duvalierists think Nation. Ignore the value of Money, sacrifice for the collective and unite in this action.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> “je ne dois à personne...mon accession à cette position de Chef d’État. Je demeure, et avant tout, le Président de l’Arrière pays.” “Le Voyage du Président Duvalier dans l’Artibonite,” 28 June 1958, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>56</sup> Michel Aubin to Secrétaire d’Etat de l’intérieur et de la Défense Nationale, 6 November 1958, folder 2112, Interior, ANH, PauP.

The regime's rallies, meetings, and speeches informed peasants about their rights and what rendered them good citizens within the parameters of the regime's patronage.

In addition, the joint effort of the ODVA helped stretched the regime's tentacles into the lives of Artibonite peasants scattered across the expanse of the valley. According to a U.S. official report, the ODVA reached out to a population of 300,000 peasants to improve local communities by employing techniques such as sending out "a mobile projection truck [that] visits remote farm areas" to distribute "simple posters, leaflets, exhibits and radio programs [that] make a persistent attempt to spread the notion of a better way of life."<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the performance reports of U.S. officials reveal advances in agriculture in the once arid valley of Artibonite.

On 8 May 1959, Harry Yoe, the director of U.S. Operation Missions (USOM), wrote to Washington that the expansion of ODVA irrigation under the Duvalier period surpassed expectations established when irrigation construction was originally undertaken: "The yield of \$16,000,000 on 50,000 acres shows a farm unit gross return of \$320 per acre or \$640 per unit, which is a return not anticipated six years ago."<sup>58</sup> On 25 January 1962, the newspaper *Haiti Sun*, which was privately owned by a U.S. citizen, reported that U.S. Ambassador Raymond L. Thurston went on a four-hour inspection tour of the Artibonite valley. Thurston returned with news that "he was impressed with the scale and magnitude of the joint Haitian-American efforts for the economic development of the Artibonite Valley [and] saw miles upon miles of irrigation..."<sup>59</sup> The agricultural progress in the Artibonite largely resulted from the expansion of the irrigation system which reached projected goals of watering approximately 70,000 acres of

---

<sup>57</sup> Report: The ICA Program in Haiti, 1961, Haiti, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Harry W. Yoe to Ray J. Lyman, 8 May 1959 Box 2, RG 469, Records of the U.S. Foreign Assistance, USOM to Haiti Office of the Director, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>59</sup> "Thurston Views Work In Artibonite," 25 January 1960, *Haiti Sun*.

land. And records suggest that plans might have been underway to irrigate the entire valley covering about a million acres.<sup>60</sup>

Strides, too, were made in irrigation expansion across the country. The construction and rehabilitation of the following systems contributed to the spread of irrigated peasant farms:

Cabaret, Les Anglais, Port-de-Paix, St. Marc, Manneville, Cul-de-Sac, Léogane Plain, Cayes, Camp Perrin Torbeck, Quartier-Morin, St. Raphael, and Grison Garde.<sup>61</sup> In total, which included the Artibonite project, irrigation between 1960 and 1962 throughout Haiti reached an unprecedented capacity of 150,000 acres that surpassed previous levels of operation.<sup>62</sup>

Also around the period between 1959 and 1962, newspapers were reporting Duvalier's land distribution everywhere that seemingly sought to complement agricultural progress. *Haiti Sun* reported that during a "May Day" celebration of agriculture, Duvalier signed land grants to two hundred and sixty-two peasants, rewarding each of them four hectares of land.<sup>63</sup> In the titled article "LAND GRANTS TO THOSE WHO WORK," *Haiti Sun* reported, on 18 September 1960, that the Duvalier state signed more than forty-seven land titles to peasants in Baradère and

---

<sup>60</sup>"An area of 1 million acres is the source for the Artibonite irrigation project, and the huge Peligre Dam serves as the reservoir here, a pilot area of 30,000 acres has been selected as demonstration and raining area for technicians and farmer." See, The ICA Program in Haiti, 1961, United States of America Operations Mission to Haiti, 5.

<sup>61</sup> See, The ICA Program in Haiti, 1961, United States of America Operations Mission to Haiti, 21-23. For St. Raphael and Grison Garde, see Albertano C'de Baca, Acting F&A Officer to Richard M. Highsmith, Professor of Agriculture Geography, 1 March 1963, AGR 9-, USAID Mission to Haiti/Executive Office, Central Decimal Files: 1962-1962, RG 0286, NARA, College Park, Maryland. Mentioned in a chart prepared by Jack L. Sparks, Irrigation Operation and Maintenance Engineer. The chart curiously provides most completion dates of irrigation systems prior to the Duvalier government, including Quartier Morin, Cul-de-Sac, and even St. Raphael (when it later contradicts this fact).

<sup>62</sup>"History shows that irrigated agriculture was introduced into Haiti by the French during the days of French Colonization. By 1789 45,000 hectares (112,500 acres) were under irrigation. The Cul-de-Sac Plain and the Cayes Plain were the two major areas, having 13,000 hectares (32,500 acres) and 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) respectively. In reviewing present day irrigation, it must be noted that the area placed under irrigation has increased less than 40 per cent. Estimates give the total irrigated area for the 1961-1962 season to be about 60,000 hectares (150,000 acres). Most of this increase is due to the expansion of irrigation in the Artibonite Valley Irrigation Project, the construction of the St. Raphael Irrigation System, and the expansion in the Cul de Sac Plain." See, Albertano C'de Baca, Acting F&A Officer to Richard M. Highsmith, Professor of Agriculture Geography, 1 March 1963, AGR 9-, USAID Mission to Haiti/Executive Office, Central Decimal Files: 1962-1962, RG 0286, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>63</sup> "50,000 To Parade," 2 May 1960, *Haiti Sun*.

bragged that land distribution had “multiplied throughout the country.”<sup>64</sup> *Haiti-Journal*, on 18 November, published public minutes on the distribution of state land to peasants living in Grand Boucan du Sud; on 6 December, the same newspaper reported the distribution of land to peasants on Ile de la Torture.<sup>65</sup> To be sure, land grants and redistribution was part of statecraft since independence. And not enough evidence was found to determine the extent of the regime’s land distribution policies. Still, the publicity around land redistribution provides enough evidence to suggest that land grants served to bolster the regime’s *justice sociale* program.

\*\*\*\*\*

However, exiled political elites lobbied Washington to suspend aid to the Duvalier government. In the context of the Cold War and in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, the exiled political opposition tried to convince Washington officials that the regime’s repression fostered an unstable political climate that would lead to communist takeover in Haiti. After Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries overthrew the U.S.-backed Batista government in 1959, Dwight D. Eisenhower’s administration grew evasive in its support for the Duvalier regime, thinking that bolstering the oppressive regime would have unintended consequences that could lead to a socialist revolutions. Receiving news from political exiles that the regime was creating political disorder in Haiti strengthened U.S. concerns regarding Duvalier’s rule. Moreover, exiled political groups called for the end of U.S. aid to Haiti that underwrote development programs associated with the regime's ideology of *justice sociale*. On 12 January 1959, the exile group called the *Haitian Democratic League* held a public meeting in New York where former presidential candidate Dejoie was the chief speaker. The organization, according to the *New*

---

<sup>64</sup> “LAND GRANTS TO THOSE WHO WORK,” 18 September 18, 1960, *Haiti Sun*.

<sup>65</sup> “Nouvelle distribution de terre aux Paysans,” 18 November 1960, *Haiti-Journal*; “Distribution Terre Ile de la Torture,” 6 December 1960, *Haiti-Journal*.

*York Times*, drew up a resolution that urged "the United States [to] halt all aid to Haiti."<sup>66</sup> In addition to exiled groups pleading with the U.S. government to cut aid, tensions between the Duvalier regime and U.S. aid officials also threatened to stall assistance for development in Haiti.

Despite the fact that ODVA was contractually a joint U.S.-Haitian project that irrigated the valley of Artibonite, a confidential letter written by the chief of U.S. aid in Haiti, Harry Yoe, revealed U.S. designs to maintain complete control over the ODVA administration. Yoe wrote, "I believe I am correct in thinking that the placing of the U.S. Government employees under the administrative jurisdiction of a foreign government is taboo." He admitted that the Haitian leading ODVA administrator only had nominal control over operations. Rather than work under a Haitian administrator, Yoe disclosed that a U.S. official "would run the Administrator from offstage."<sup>67</sup> In 1960, Duvalier dismissed the ODVA's Haitian administrator, Garvey Laurent, who was essentially a puppet for U.S. personnel.<sup>68</sup> Duvalier's action against ODVA's administrator set in motion events that would eventually lead to the end of U.S. aid to Haiti.

In response to what U.S. personnel viewed as unilateral decisions by the Duvalier regime, Yoe suspended a 3 million dollar loan disbursement to the Artibonite irrigation project.<sup>69</sup> Next, U.S. officials ran a smear campaign against the Duvalier regime in the U.S. press. Duvalier's dismissal of the ODVA administrator was portrayed in U.S. newspapers as the result of an autocratic political witch-hunt orchestrated by the Duvalier regime. For example, the *New York*

---

<sup>66</sup> "Ouster of Regime in Haiti Predicted," 12 January 1959, *The New York Times*.

<sup>67</sup> Harry W. Yoe to M.L. Spector, 12 December 1959, Box 2, RG 469, Central Decimal Files, Records of the U.S. Foreign Assistance, USOM to Haiti Office of the Director, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>68</sup> "Rapport de la Commission sur les Activités de l'ODVA," 5 March 1960, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>69</sup> "ODVA's Garvey Laurent Resigns," 15 May 1960, *Haiti Sun*.

*Times* described the discharge of Laurent and other ODVA personnel as “summarily dismissals.”<sup>70</sup> U.S. aid to Haiti was temporarily suspended.

In the meantime, U.S aid officials on the ground prepared reports supporting the basis for suspension of the DLF loan to the Duvalier government. The reasoning was often based on depictions of a despotic Duvalier bent on ruling for ruling sake without making any mention of the agricultural advances that U.S. aid officials previously documented. Instead, exoticized portrayals of an unaccountable primitive state were played up. “The [Duvalier] Administration stays in power,” the USOM program officer Caspar D. Green assured his superior Yoe on 13 May 1960, “because there is no opposition; because government in Haiti directly affects only a very small percentage of the population; and because the President is regarded, even by highly educated professional men, more as a tribal elder than as the chief administrator of a modern state.” The officer continued that U.S. assistance was only used to sustain the regime, “So long as President Duvalier retains personal control of the [Duvalier] Administration, it will have systematically built into it elements which shut it off from accompanying any internal recuperation or from following any constructive policy. Since the only purpose of the Administration is to maintain Dr. Duvalier in power, ‘aid’ for any other purpose is, in his view, beside the point. But aid directed to the purpose of keeping him in power would be at an ever-increasing cost and would promote rather than retarding the built-in processes of deterioration.”<sup>71</sup>

As U.S. officials marshaled its defense for suspended assistance, Green received news that these events regarding aid triggered an anxiety within Duvalier that manifested in his

---

<sup>70</sup> “Top U.S. Aid Plan to Haiti Halted,” 17 March 1960, *New York Times*.

<sup>71</sup> From Caspar D. Green to Harry W. Yoe, Director, USOM/Haiti, 13 May 1960 in “Characteristics of the Haitian Government Under the Duvalier, 24 July 1966, POL 15 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.



brooding over the impending political crisis. “Minister of Public Health, Boulos, deeply concerned at the deterioration of the situation, has commented that President Duvalier spends all his waking hours with politics,” wrote Green. In the midst of U.S. aid officials and political exiles lobbying against his regime, Duvalier feared losing power and scrambled for an alternative to his populism of *justice sociale* that was financed by waning U.S. support.

Emerging out of Duvalier’s anxious ruminations regarding suspended aid did not take long to show itself. On August 3, the regime for the very first time publicly held a militia parade that took place on the lawn of the National Palace. The regime announced that the event commemorated the second anniversary of the civil militia which was supposedly formed after a rebel attack in 1958. Haitians, however, until that point never heard of a civil militia. “Men and women of the Volunteer Civilian Militia staged a review and drill, unveiling themselves to the public for the first time,” reported *Haiti Sun*.<sup>72</sup> Haitians, of course, heard about urban-based armed loyalists of the regime. Still, the public parade signaled something new about the militia. But limited evidence leaves us with two possible interpretations of the militia parade: either the regime was misleading the public about the militia’s two-years existence and was in fact newly created, or the parade marked a new phase in the militia’s buildup as it moved from an urban to a rural-based militia. Whatever the reasons may have been, the militia parade was certainly an audacious response to the temporary suspension of U.S. aid and mounting opposition by exiled political groups.

During the same parade, one militia commander announced that the regime formed the militia to defend against “the eternal enemies of the people, Haitians while in foreign lands,

---

<sup>72</sup> “*Le Défilé de la Milice Civile Volontaire*,” 3 August 1960, *Le Nouvelliste*; and “CIVILIAN MILITIA PALACE PARADE: PUBLIC GETS GLIMPSE OF CITIZENS’ ARMY AND TROUSERED WOMEN,” 17 August 1960, *Haiti Sun*.

blinded by materialism, don't understand my nice warnings, they started a cold war to paralyze the initial working plans of the Government.”<sup>73</sup> Bordes was alluding to the supposed role of exile rebels colluding with the U.S. to suspend aid and overthrow the regime. The popular support that the Duvalier regime had obtained through his populist programs of *justice sociale* was funded by U.S. assistance. Thus, the threat of *justice sociale* crumbling apart compelled Duvalier to create a militia as a way to institutionalize popular support in the countryside before withering away along with U.S. aid. Although by September 1960 U.S. aid resumed temporarily, the militia continued to exist and expand. In the next year, for example, about three thousand members of the militia from the Artibonite marched in the capital to show their support for the regime.<sup>74</sup> The ambivalence of Washington along with the mounting threat of the Haitian political exiles drove the regime seeks support mainly from the rural population. Thus, the regime, built a nationwide militia that incorporated its popular support base into its political machinery. The buildup of the militia, which converged with calls by the exiled opposition groups and U.S. aid officials to suspend aid to the Duvalier regime, convinced Washington to permanently suspend aid in 1962. Under the presidency of President John F. Kennedy, the U.S. government ordered the full suspension of aid and cited, among other reasons, how the creation of the militia undermined the influence of the U.S. backed Haitian military.

At the time, the Haitian military remained under U.S. influence, but the creation of a militia loyal to Duvalier checked any military intrigues operating against his regime and at the behest of the U.S. government. In other words, Duvalier’s militia prevented the U.S.-backed military from overthrowing his government. In the White House’s oval office, a cabinet official

---

<sup>73</sup> “CIVILIAN MILITIA PALACE PARADE: PUBLIC GETS GLIMPSE OF CITIZENS' ARMY AND TROUSERED WOMEN,” 17 August 1960, *Haiti Sun*.

<sup>74</sup> “3,000 Miliciens de l'Artibonite défilent devant le Chef de l'Etat,” 30 December 1960, *Le Nouvelliste*.

urged Kennedy to cancel because of “a constant policy of encouraging a buildup of a militia devoted to Duvalier at the expense of the regular armed forces.”<sup>75</sup> This 1962 political crisis not only marked the end of U.S. assistance, but also of *justice sociale* as the basis of Duvalier’s populism.

Duvalier’s break from *justice sociale*, a derivative of the peasant-based nationalist ideas born out of the U.S. occupation, was articulated in a speech he gave earlier that year on 1 January (i.e., Haitian Independence Day). In his speech, just as he did in his younger years as a *noirist*, Duvalier returned to racialist themes. But his speech did not resemble *noirist* discourses in terms of stressing color tensions. In fact, Duvalier’s speech condemned “the lower middle class born of these masses” that exploited peasants – he meant the black bourgeoisie. No, his speech did not possess the contents of *noirisme* that favored the black middle class.

Rather, the racial content of Duvalier’s speech seemed more aligned with ideas of international black liberation while employing the vernacular of the Haitian Revolution. Duvalier argued that his efforts to develop Haiti were thwarted because he was a “misunderstood Negro [the regime’s translations].” He decried:

If my country and my people in the Latin American and Caribbean context, are a black entity having no tie ethnically with those surrounding it — a black entity different by its genesis as a Nation, — a genesis responsible somewhat for a laborious growth and development, because on the burnt soil of former Santo Domingo, it fell to share of the heirs of the Man of Comiers to create a civilization for the benefit of the chattel slaves raised to the dignity of human beings; —if My country and My country kept in backwardness for two decades in their aspirations to normal and free growth, today cry out their feelings of frustration to legitimate the opening of new horizons, who shall dare throw them the stone of curse? Who?

---

<sup>75</sup> Timothy J. Naftali, *Presidential Recording, John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises Volume I, July 30-August 1962* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 295.

In addition, Duvalier announced to Haitians, “we will not surrender this country to slavery in order to supply our arid soils with water, – with roads to foster civilization and progress, – with energy for the promotion of development!”<sup>76</sup> Duvalier’s speech reflected a turning point in the regime’s populism. It was leaving behind the materialist *justice sociale* and embracing diasporic ideas of black liberation. More importantly, by alluding to the Haitian Revolution, Duvalier was indicating that the regime was reviving traditions of arming the civilian population. The *tonton makout* militia was already in the process of being made.

---

<sup>76</sup> François Duvalier, *Paix et Pain Pour Survivre: Message Du Janvier 1962 Au Peuple Haitien* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de L’État, 1962), 39-42.

### Chapter Three

#### **Making Peasants *Chèf*: The *Tonton Makout* Militia, Counter-Military Politics, and the Moral Grammar of Terror (1960-1971)**

The regime's populism of *justice sociale* fell apart in the face of political opposition and U.S. pressure. Duvalier abandoned this materialist-based populism for another violent brand of populism that offered a glimmer of citizenship and political prestige to peasants if they armed themselves against the political opposition. However, the Duvalier regime portrayed the creation of the militia as an act to restore the militarized political order which previously provided peasants with the means to defend their interests. In all actuality, this was the regime's attempt to save itself from being weakened by mounting political opposition from groups that included political elites, exiles, disaffected military figures, and the U.S. government. In particular, Duvalier interpreted U.S. disapproval for his regime as an indication that U.S. officials would rather support his opponents. Indeed, the U.S. gradually abandoned the regime and aligned itself with key members of the political opposition. Feeling cornered and in a weakened position, the Duvalier regime announced that it was turning to the age-old political tradition of arming the rural masses to protect the regime from downfall.

In reality, Duvalier's militia approach belonged to a contemporary global trend utilized by Third World authoritarian states and European fascist governments that armed the masses in order to consolidate political control. Throughout the twentieth century Communist China,

Socialist Cuba, and Fascist Italy, just to name a few, created civil militias to buttress their respective governments. In fact, Duvalier did not have to look afar to see examples of militia buildups. In relatively the same period of time in which Duvalier began organizing his militia, Haitian newspapers ran several publications announcing Fidel Castro's peasant-based militia and its activities in Cuba.<sup>1</sup> Well informed in global politics, Duvalier seemingly followed this political vogue of arming the civilian population.

Despite these global connections, the Duvalier regime chose to depict the creation of its militia as a revival of old military customs that benefited the peasantry in order to legitimize his power. In the nineteenth-century, peasants utilized their membership in the military and insurgent groups to defend their status and rights. However with the U.S. invasion, peasants were disarmed and disempowered. Attaching himself to this history, Duvalier portrayed himself as returning arms to the rural masses in exchange for their loyalty. "Excellency, the gun that Sothonax gave us to defend our liberty and that the American occupation had taken away from us, without fear you have given back to us," a militia commander boasted during a militia parade in 1960. "Rest assured that this gun will not be turned against you. We will exclusively use it to defend the ideals of the Duvalierist Revolution."<sup>2</sup> Sothonax was a radical French commissioner that armed rebel slaves during the Haitian Revolution while reportedly saying, "Here is your liberty: he who takes this away from you will try to make you slaves again."<sup>3</sup> Though peasants previously associated freedom with guns that derived from the events of the Haitian Revolution,

---

<sup>1</sup> The Haitian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* ran reports on Cuban militias between 1960 and 1961. See, "Des Miliciens Cubains peu habiles provoquent des Accidents," 12 November 1960, *Le Nouvelliste*; "L'INVASION DE CUBA: Les Milices Paysannes luttent avec Ardeur," 18 April 1961, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>2</sup> Excellence, *le fusil que Sonthonax nous avait donné pour défendre notre liberté que l'occupation Américaine nous avait ravi, sans crainte Vous nous l'avez remis. Soyez sur que cette arme ne sera pas retournée contre Vous. Nous nous en servirons uniquement pour défendre idéaux de la Révolution Duvaliériste.*" "Le Défilé de la Milice Civile Volontaire," 3 August 1960, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>3</sup> Burt and Diederich, *Papa Doc*, 156.

the suppression of peasant rights and freedom during the U.S. occupation amounted to a post-emancipation crisis that Duvalier purportedly attempted to resolve by creating the *tonton makout* militia.

Although his actions were strategic, he attached himself to the liberating traditions of the Haitian Revolution by giving weapons and status back to the rural population. This disingenuous solution to the problem of freedom in Haiti gave false hopes to the masses. In fact, instead of carrying out reforms that eliminated abusive practices toward peasants, the regime devised a perverse solution to arm peasants as a way to fend for themselves, while serving the regime's interests. Thus, the conditions for peasant complicity in the *tonton makouts* were shaped by the regime, which left very few avenues open for self-determination. With only the option to defend their interests through arms and loyalty to the regime, thousands of previously ostracized peasants joined the *makouts*, becoming the regime's arm of repression. Occupying this complex role, *makouts* straddled between roles as oppressors and defenders of peasant interests. Oral interviews reveal that peasants turned into *makouts* because they were attracted to the opportunity of obtaining power that they utilized to fend against abusive state agents, which particularly included the rural police and *chefs de section*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, since the U.S. occupation, power in rural villages was largely concentrated in the hands of *chefs de section* (military rural police chiefs) who were notorious for subjecting peasants to arbitrary arrests and abuse. But after Duvalier created the militia, power was democratized. Or, as the elderly Adonat Touchard put it to me during an interview: “*tout te chèf*.” “Everyone was a *chèf*, then.”<sup>4</sup> By enlisting into the militia, many

---

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Adonat Touchard, Torbeck, 2014.

peasants became "*chèf*" in the Duvalier years. For these reasons, thousands of peasants joined the *makouts* and ordinary peasants became loyal to the militia and, by extension, the regime.

While loyalty to the regime was one motivating factor, archival sources also reveal a much more complicated facet that attracted peasants to the militia. Peasants also became *makouts* for their own ambitions to join the ranks of the traditional power-holders that oppressed and exploited the rural population. For instance, many collaborated with the rural police and *chef section* to reenact the role of a "*chèf*." Thus, "becoming *chèf*," oddly enough meant absorption into the police state and perpetrating traditional forms of repression. As both protectors and oppressors, *makouts* were neither simply proponents, nor opponents of pro-peasant interests. Instead, the *makouts* were a violent body that moved in contradictory directions, depending on social, political, and individual circumstances. This complexity generated contradictory popular responses to either support or to resist the *makouts*. Nevertheless, the *makout* militia was a nationwide organization of loyalists that provided the regime with widespread "consent" as well as a hidden, yet vast, defensive bulwark that protected the regime from the political opposition.

### **Defending the Regime in Exchange for Power**

In exchange for power, the regime expected *makouts* to loyally defend the position of the regime. Duvalier enlisted the masses into the militia to help the regime fight the political opposition. In particular, the regime expected the militia to counter the influence of national military that was frequently involved in intrigues against the Duvalier regime. Not only did Duvalier distrust the national army, peasants often resented the army because of its repressive practices in the countryside. During the occupation, the U.S. specifically created the Haitian army to suppress the countryside and prevent peasant insurgencies. One CIA officer later recalled: "During the occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), the US Marines created a multiservice



army that was designed originally to combat the *Cacos*, a group of peasant insurgents. The system is useful in counterinsurgency operations."<sup>5</sup> By eliminating popular insurrections, which previously checked state power, the army subsequently developed into a powerful institution beyond challenge. In the post-occupation period, the supreme power of the military certainly manifested not only in the suppression of peasants, but also in how the army meddled in state politics, forcing almost every head of state out of power up until the election of Duvalier.<sup>6</sup> With a soldiery comprising five thousand soldiers and five hundred *chef de sections*, the army had an unrivaled national monopoly over national force that transcended the influence of other political state institutions including the executive. With similar interests to check the power of the U.S.-backed military, Duvalier and armed peasants in the *makouts* would weaken the military's previously dominant position.

The decline of the military's influence began during the 1957 election that divided the military hierarchy along political party lines. High-ranking military officers were split between supporting Duvalier and the rival presidential candidate Louis Dejoie. This fractionalization diminished the military's ability to strongly influence the outcome of the election. Duvalier won the presidency, quite likely through the popular vote, and exploited these divisions among officers by promoting loyalists and discharging anti-Duvalier elements. Additionally, Duvalier carried out constant reorganizations and purges within the military; in 1962, for instance,

---

<sup>5</sup>380. Intelligence Memorandum, 20 February 1969, OCI No. 0558/69, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-10, Documents of American Republics, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d380><https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d380>.

<sup>6</sup> On the military's role in the post-occupation presidential elections, see Matthew Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*. On the role of the military's role in Duvalier's election, see Christian Alcindor, "U.S.-Haiti Relations from 1957 to 1963: Anticommunism, Nation-Building, and Racial Diplomacy in the Ages of National Liberation," (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2002) 65-69.

Duvalier named his fifth army chief in five years.<sup>7</sup> By the late sixties, Duvalier purged or replaced over seventy-five officers trained in U.S. service schools. He would also closed down the Haitian Military Academy and the U.S. Naval Missions to prevent officers from receiving U.S. instruction. "Little or no training has been conducted by the Haitian armed forces since then," bemoaned a CIA officer in a report.<sup>8</sup> When in power, Duvalier moved against the military because of its tendencies to intervene in national politics, but most importantly due to its ties to the U.S. government.

Violent conflict with elements in the Haitian army also compelled Duvalier to create a militia that was designed to neutralize the army and assume the position of national defense. There were many disgruntled elements of the army that joined the exiled opposition, and conspired to overthrow the regime. However, their plots and attacks contributed to the creation of a civilian force that was armed by Duvalier himself. One particular attack caused Duvalier to take action. In 28 July 1958, four former military officers and four American mercenaries led a coup d'état and occupied the military headquarters that stood directly across from the National Palace. In response, the regime distributed arms to about two hundred urban denizens in the capital to defend against the rebel attack on the military headquarters.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, the rebel attack was suppressed and set in motion the process of the state arming and organizing ordinary civilians into a militia.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Diederich and Al Burt, *Papa Doc, Haiti and Its Dictator*, Toronto: The Bodley Head (1969), 189. Laguerre details much of the laws and reorganizing of the military under Duvalier. See, Laguerre, *The Military and Society in Haiti*, 107-110.

<sup>8</sup> See, n.5 regarding 380. Intelligence Memorandum, 20 February 1969.

<sup>9</sup> Diederich and Burt, *Papa Doc*, 113-131.

<sup>10</sup> The regime further divided the military, in December 1959, by selecting army loyalists to form an independent paramilitary force called the *garde présidentielle* that served directly under Duvalier's control. See, Laguerre, *The Military and Society in Haiti*, 111.

In the aftermath, Duvalier was frank about his plans to build a civilian force that checked the military's dominance. Quoting a French political scientist, Duvalier wrote, "In nations where the tradition of *pronunciamientos* [military coups] are strong, such as Latin America, only the constitution of popular militias can prevent militaries from dominating the state."<sup>11</sup> Thus, Duvalier created the *makout* militia that served to splinter the army's monopoly over force, curb its interventionist tendencies, and eliminate the intrigue of its disenchanted army officers. However, as described in the previous chapter, the fall of the populism *justice sociale* due to the lost of U.S. support and mounting exiled political opposition, also persuaded Duvalier to turn to peasants for armed support.

Indeed, the regime recruited thousands of peasants into this militia, which outnumbered the army of a few thousand. By 1960, Duvalier transformed the civil militia into an immense peasant-based corps. "The militia composed of 90% of men of the backcountry who in appearance represent nothing," declared a militia commander during the 1960 militia parade.<sup>12</sup> Militia membership was large – certainly in the tens of thousands and conceivably in the hundreds – and Haitian peasants formed its bulk.<sup>13</sup> The early regime did not maintain official estimates partly due to neglecting to register membership.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is quite plausible that the Duvalier regime itself knew little about how many people were in the civil militia. Nonetheless, this did not prevent one Haitian ambassador to boast in Washington that the militia

---

<sup>11</sup> François Duvalier, *Mémoires d'un leader du tiers monde* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de L'État 1969), 89.

<sup>12</sup> "Le Défilé de la Milice Civile Volontaire," 3 August 1960, *Le Nouvelliste*.

<sup>13</sup> One Haitian ambassador was recorded to have boasted in Washington that the militia comprised 200,000 active members (possibly excluding thousands of others rural denizens who were less active). Call of Haitian Foreign Minister, 19 June 1969, POL 15-1 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>14</sup> Only in 1984 did the regime begin to register members of the militia. See Laguerre *The Military and Society in Haiti*, 116.

had about two hundred thousand active *tonton makouts*.<sup>15</sup> At best this estimate was a good guess.

During oral interviews, elderly peasants gave their take on the vastness of militia membership. "All the zones were filled, all!" bellowed Marc, a peasant living in the northern rural village of Grison-Garde.<sup>16</sup> The former *makout* Louis Nicolas of Galmant du Plat remembers, "the entire population was *milisyen*."<sup>17</sup> "We can't count this thing. It was vast. Many people," former *makouts* Élie and Ton Tatou of Camp Louise exclaimed almost simultaneously.<sup>18</sup> The market woman Émilsien "Nana" Jean-Gilles of Gotier recalls, "many *milisyen* lived in this zone."<sup>19</sup> When asked if some members of his family were enlisted in the militia, the peasant activist Desilien of Lacoma coughed out, "*woy ah* (of course), there were."<sup>20</sup> Capturing the inclusivity and vastness of the *makouts*, one Abricots peasant remarked, "Everyone was *chef*, if you weren't *chef* it was because you didn't want to."<sup>21</sup>

By 1962, Duvalier branded this peasant-based militia, *Volontaire de la Sécurité Nationale* (VSN) whose members were officially known as *milicien* (or *milisyen* in Haitian Kreyòl). However, traumatized by state terror, the Haitian populace secretly gave the militia its notorious name: *tonton makout*. The term refers to a straw-sack carrying old peasant man in rural legend that abducted wayward children from unsuspecting parents – a fitting name given that some Haitians heard of the peasant militia whisking away friends, relatives, and neighbors that were never seen again. Nevertheless, thousands of previously ostracized peasants enlisted

---

<sup>15</sup> One Haitian ambassador was recorded to have boasted in Washington that the militia comprised 200,000 active members (possibly excluding thousands of others rural denizens who were less active). See, Call of Haitian Foreign Minister, 19 June 1969, POL 15-1 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Marc in rural section Grison Garde, Acul du Nord, June 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Louis Nicolas *habitation* Galmant du Plat, Quartier Morin, 23 May 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Élie and Ton Tatou in rural section Camp Louise, Acul-du-Nord, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Émilsien Jean-Gilles in rural section Gotier, Jean Rabel, 29 November 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Desilien "Tonde" in rural section of Lacoma, Jean-Rabel, 13 June 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with unnamed peasant in Anse-à-Foleur, July 2015.

into the *makout* militia with the opportunity to counter the influence of the military that had long suppressed rural communities since U.S. intervention.

Rural denizens recall the vast body of *makouts*, though often ill equipped and undisciplined, overtaking the traditional power of the U.S. backed army. The former *makout* André Georges of Bas Limbé (Kr: Enba Linbe) explained: "The real state was the Haitian army. Then, Duvalier created *milisyen* – *milisyen* was what we call *tonton makout*. They were the real [George stops and continues] I mean the military was the military, but *tonton makouts* commanded [power]...That is why they got more respect from Duvalier because when I was in it, when you heard we had to go Port-au-Prince, one would see so much traffic." The vast number of *makouts* served to counter the military's influence. Some even saw the *makouts* as more influential than the army. "The army had no value for people," one tax agent of Bobon recalled, "the *milisyen* were above their heads and everyone else."<sup>22</sup> The former *makout* Ton Tatou exclaimed, "I remember an army lieutenant was disrespecting folks around here and a *makout* commander grabbed the lieutenant by the collar and threatened him to stop, by his collar!"<sup>23</sup> For rural denizens, the Haitian army lost its previous prestige and influence to the growing number of *makouts*. They saw themselves as a group tasked with the special role of defending the regime. Previously ostracized, *makouts* and peasant loyalists were recognized by Duvalier as agents of national security.<sup>24</sup> Duvalier's politics of recognition proved powerful enough to persuade peasants to risk their lives in defense of the regime.

Both *makouts* and ordinary peasants, who were sometimes indistinguishable, fervently engaged in guarding the state against invasions by the exiled opposition. Exiled political elites

---

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Maias in Bonbon, August, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ton Tatou in rural section Camp Louise, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> In 1962, the Duvalier regime decreed outlining militia responsibilities. See, "*Arrêté définissant et réglementant provisoirement les rôles et attributions des Volontaires de la Sécurité NLE*," 16 November 1962, *Le Nouvelliste*.

opposing the regime often underestimated the regime's influence in the countryside and the growing participation of peasants in national defense. During a meeting with the U.S. State Department officials, one exiled opponent dismissed peasants as "politically inert and detached."<sup>25</sup> This explains why Haitian exiled rebels repeatedly made the mistake of seeking refuge in the countryside where they attempted to recruit peasants into their ranks. To their surprise, however, rebels often stumbled upon rural communities that were the strongholds of *makouts* and peasant loyalists. These indistinguishable supporters of the regime often gave away rebel hideouts or joined state forces to eliminate rebel activities.

A very telling case reveals how most rebel activities were squelched in the countryside. In 1962, the exiled writer Jacques Stephen Alexis was a marxist and pro-peasant novelist and landed in the northwest zone of Haiti with plans to mobilize local peasants for what he probably imagined would be the beginning of a rural-based communist revolution in Haiti. In an unforeseen twist of fate, peasants reported Alexis to local authorities that led to his disappearance.<sup>26</sup> Another example involved Clement Barbot who was the erstwhile confidant of Duvalier. In 1963, Barbot, now in cahoots with the CIA, coordinated rebel plots against the regime in a secret hiding place in a rural community, just north of the capital. However, peasants gave away his hideout to the authorities in July 1963 that led to his immediate execution.<sup>27</sup>

In other instances, peasant loyalists and *makouts* took up arms and actually fought against rebel attacks. On 26 April the wealthy Hector Riobé led a group of armed rebels who attacked a

---

<sup>25</sup> "Political Situation in Haiti," 18 April 1963, XR POL 26 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>26</sup> Haiti Situation, 6 May 1963, POL HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland; also see, Nicholls, From Dessalines to Duvalier, 231.

<sup>27</sup> Barbot was supported by the CIA. See, Opposition Plans of Clement Barbot, 28 March, Central Intelligence, <http://www.foia.cia.gov>. Barbot execution is found in an official report. See, American Embassy to State Department, 20 July 1963, POL 2-1 HAI, RG 59, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

military post in the rural commune of Kenscoff.<sup>28</sup> Riobé led this attack because he was incensed after his father, a factory owner, was murdered by a *makout* over a labor dispute. The *makout* was later spotted driving around town in a Mercedes Benz belonging to the Riobé family. Angered by his father's death and *makout* appropriation of his family's property, Riobé organized and armed revolt in the mountaintop zone of Kenscoff in 1963 that oversaw the capital. According to both Haitian and U.S. reports, Kenscoff peasants joined authorities in beating back Riobé's rebel forces.

At seven o'clock in the morning, a Kenscoff peasant woman surprised one rebel, Jean-Pierre Hudicourt, and smashed his head with a club while her husband wrestled away a 22 caliber telescoped rifle from his grasp. By ten o'clock, the ensuing battle left four soldiers, four *makouts*, and a peasant loyalist named René Ocène injured; another *makout* and three other peasant loyalists died during combat. After rebels were violently suppressed, the local army general sent an internal missive to Duvalier that described how peasant involvement contributed to the regime's victory over Riobé and rebels in Kenscoff: "The rural population in the zone of Kenscoff demonstrate a limitless devotion regarding the Government of their well-liked *Chef*, Doctor François Duvalier... Armed with clubs, machetes and instruments of plowing, the peasants of Kenscoff... hunted the enemy with tenacity".<sup>29</sup> Unbeknownst to opposing rebels, the countryside was the lion's den of the regime, hiding rural denizens and *makouts* who comprised the core of Duvalier's support base.

---

<sup>28</sup> Testimony by Nancy Tunier-Férère. See "Hector et Nous," 18 July 2015, <http://www.haitiluttecontre-impunite.org/texts/123>, *Haiti Fights Against Impunity*.

<sup>29</sup> "Les populations rurales de la zone de Kenscoff se montrant d'un dévouement sans borne envers le Gouvernement de leur Chef bien-aimé, le Docteur François Duvalier. Elles les sont guère inquiétées par les sectes de brigandages et les lâches assassinâtes perpétrés par les terroristes. Armée de bâtons, de manchettes et d'instruments aratoires, les paysans de Kenscoff, comme aux temps héroïques qui donnèrent naissance à la Patrie Commune, poursuivent l'ennemi avec acharnement." Jacques Larouche to President Duvalier, 18 July 1963, *Haiti Fights against Impunity*, <http://www.haitiluttecontre-impunite.org/texts/39>,

Popular support in the countryside protected the regime from being overthrown. And though this was almost a secret to exiled rebels and U.S. officials, the Dominican President Juan Bosch understood the source of Duvalier's political strength. Reflecting on U.S. attempts to use his country's border to mobilize exiled rebel groups against Duvalier, in the 1960s, Bosch remarked, "it was very stupid to use our country in order to overthrow Duvalier because he had popular support. That is why it was not easy to overthrow him."<sup>30</sup> And yet, the U.S. continued to support exiled rebels and political intrigues against the Duvalier regime because they found unfathomable the idea that peasants would assist rural *makouts* to defend the regime.

To be sure, the complexity of the political terrain did sometimes allow rebel plots to find support among peasants. However, these plots only served to further divide peasants into either proponents or opponents of Duvalier that led to internecine violence. In 1964, for example, a group of exiled rebels organized themselves in the southeast region of Thiotte and found support among some local peasants. One army report to Duvalier on 30 June admitted, "they [rebels] captured many Haitian peasants employed to transport their equipment."<sup>31</sup> On 3 July, the chief of the army demanded that the local captain provide, "the nature of aid received by the rural population."<sup>32</sup> After rebels broke into the store of a local merchant family called "Bernadotte" and seized merchandise to redistribute among the peasants in the nearby rural villages of Mapou and Citadelle, Haitian officials began to suspect that the rebels were successfully gathering stronger local support.

---

<sup>30</sup> "An interview with Juan Bosch," *NACLA Report Americas*, 46:2, 73-77. DOI: 10.1080/10714839.2013.11725574. This citation format was required by NACLA.

<sup>31</sup> "*ils [rebels] ont capturé plusieurs paysans haïtiens employés au transport de leur équipement.*" Com. Dep. Ouest to CHEMG, 30 June 1964, Box 1, folder Rebels' Landing, Haitian Military Documents Collections (HMDC), Schomburg Center in Research Black Culture (SCRBC), New York Public Library (NYPL).

<sup>32</sup> Constant to CHEMG, 3 July 1964, Box 1, folder Rebels' Landing, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.



As events increasingly appeared favorable to the rebels, the regime turned to "*les VSN et CIVILS DUVALIERISTE*" of the southeast region and summoned them to join the army and fight the rebels and peasant sympathizers.<sup>33</sup> In other words, Duvalier mobilized local *makouts* and peasant loyalists to fight rebels and their peasant sympathizers. Civil war broke out in Thiotte that resulted in a massacre. On July 6, the local military captain sent Duvalier a coded message that was translated as: "*Habitant* peasants [of] the Mapou and Citadelle zone sympathize and aid. Requesting authorization to raze these two localities."<sup>34</sup> The authorities, which comprised soldiers, *makouts*, and peasant loyalists, participated in the suppression of the rebel movement. The number of those killed remains unknown but the incident came to be known as the Thiotte Massacre and served as an example of the kind of state terror that consumed peasants who sympathized with the political opposition.<sup>35</sup>

Cases of peasants either supporting rebel forces, or supporting the Duvalier regime challenges the conventional wisdom that peasants were politically ostracized in the Duvalier years. Quite to the contrary, peasants were bound up in the political conflicts between exiled political elites trying to topple the state and this new regime. In the summer of 1964, peasants influenced the longevity of another rebel attack in the southwest peninsula. Hailing from the peninsula's urban elite families in Jérémie and backed by the CIA, a group of thirteen exiled

---

<sup>33</sup> Fritzner Henry, Prefect of Jacmel to Dr. François Duvalier, 4 July 1964, military documents on *Haiti Fights against Impunity*, <http://www.haitiluttecontre-impunite.org>.

<sup>34</sup> "*Habitants zone Mapou et Citadelle sympatisent [sic] et les aident. Sollicité autorisation raser ces deux localités à titre exemple.*" And it is also an example of how the regime was able to turn peasants against their neighbors to preserve the hegemony of the regime. Take notice of the fact that the captain did not refer to them as "*paysan*" but relegating peasants to the more derogative "*habitants*" when requesting official permission to "raze" the peasant communities of Thiotte. Capitaine Jose Borges to CHEMG, 6 July 1964, Box 1, folder Rebels' Landing, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>35</sup> To excuse the murder of those the regime vowed to protect, the regime debased the characters of sympathizing peasants. After reporting the execution of sympathizing peasants on 9 July, the local prefect demeaned their characters, "*La section rurale de Mapou ayant été repéré des rebelles qui ont eu l'adhésion de plusieurs paysans, notamment les voleurs de renom condamnés en maintes fois par le Tribunal de Paix de Bellanse [sic].*" Edgard Jameu, Prefect to Docteur François Duvalier, 9 July 1964, military documents on *Haiti Fights against Impunity*, <http://www.haitiluttecontre-impunite.org/texts/107>.

rebels calling themselves *Jeune Haïti* returned to the peninsula and launched a rebellion in the region's mountainous countryside. *Jeune Haïti*'s rebellion lasted two months and twenty days, surpassing the length of most rebel attempts during the Duvalier period. One U.S. official found the longevity of the rebellion suspicious and reported, "the fact that such a very small band of rebels succeeded in withstanding government efforts to destroy them for almost three months seems to be *prima facie* evidence that they were not operating in a hostile milieu." For this U.S. official, the truth was in the silence of the regime's propaganda machine.

The Haitian government released a public communiqué regarding details of the rebel attack and, contrary to state custom, "there were no reports of rebels' having been killed or wounded by the peasants themselves."<sup>36</sup> Eventually, local authorities, *makouts*, and peasant loyalists repressed the *Jeune Haïti* movement, which was followed by a massacre that killed urban elite families of Jérémie in the most murderous fashion. Events surrounding the *Jeune Haïti* attack showed the world the virulence of *makout* terror. The attack also revealed to some that the militia was an unpaid ill-equipped force.

\*\*\*\*\*

Perhaps the most overlooked fact regarding the VSN/*makout* militia was their status as unpaid volunteers because the Duvalier regime lacked the revenue to fund its vast militia. The 1964 rebel attack even gave U.S. officials the opportunity to rate the performance of the *makouts* and they were highly unimpressed. One U.S. official wrote to Washington, "The VSN in the south showed again that they were ineffective as a fighting force against an armed aggressive enemy. From all reports they were poorly-armed, poorly-led, poorly disciplined and without adequate logistic support." The report went on to say that many *makouts* feared the "danger of

---

<sup>36</sup> American Embassy to State Department, 13 February 1965, XR POL 23 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

getting shot plus hardship of being in the field without adequate supplies."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, *makouts* participated in national security but were meagerly supplied; they were not even paid.

The costs of militia uniforms, arms, and, in rare cases, unofficial membership fees were borne by peasants. Communities sometimes came together to gather cash for a fellow peasant to be inducted into the militia. But *makouts* rarely received material rewards from the state. Peasants and former *makouts* admitted in interviews that the militia's role was a taxing, unpaid labor. "The way they suffered, do you know they were never paid," Floreine Desir interjected mockingly during an interview with her husband and former *makout*, Georges. She continued, "when summoned to Port-au-Prince, they had to spend their own money...every night they would guard the homes of powerful people (*gwo moun*) staring blankly without any coins in their pockets." Georges, then, smirked and somberly admitted: "We were not even paid one *gouden* [the lowest amount in coin money], our service wasn't paid for, we marched...on patrol. Ask me what we were looking out for? I hear we're looking out for rebels. Where are the rebels? Who really knows? You're walking around breaking your body all night."<sup>38</sup> If not paid, what did *makouts* get in return for loyally defending the regime against attacks? Without much revenue, the regime offered political power in the form of political recognition and privileges in exchange for *makout* loyalty.

Previously separated from political life and shunned by urban society, peasants expressed that membership in the *makouts* increased their political and social status that even high-ranking state officials and urban elites recognized as important. The former *makout* Pè Camille of Ravine du Roche recalls, "*Milisyen* were not paid, none were. But when a *milisyen*, one was greatly

---

<sup>37</sup> From American Embassy Port-au-Prince to Department of State, November 5, 1965, POL 2-1 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Floreine Desir in Limbé, June 2015.

valued (*gran valè*) even if you were the minister of justice, you must value *milisyen*."<sup>39</sup> Georges also explains:

There were places one [a *makout*] would go, some people came and greeted you including big state officials [*gwo leta*] who [called *makouts*] my brother, my brother. What was that, we weren't supposed to rub with those folks, because [before] they would call you a peasant [*abitan payzan*] who lives in the wild. How else were we going to find people in Port-au-Prince, to find people in Okap [Haiti's two largest cities] who wanted to rub with us [if not a member in the militia]. Now you're spending so many days in militia headquarters [in the cities], they need you so much you can't return home—you think if we stayed as *abitan* in the wild woods could we have survived? Now we're rubbing with [powerful] people, becoming enlightened [*eklere*] if someone does you wrong you know where to go to defend yourself, you're not a maroon [*mawon*] anymore. You're not scared."<sup>40</sup>

The prize behind joining the *makout* militia involved the politics of recognition and prestige that manifested in obtaining respect from influential figures. In other cases, *makouts* utilized their status to break down the urban-rural divisions that functioned to discriminate against peasants. Some *makouts*, for example, saw the capital for the very first time while participating in militia parades near the National Palace.<sup>41</sup> In other words, membership in the militia increased peasant's sense of self in a political system that previously ostracized them and privileged urban culture.

It turns out that one source generating peasant enthusiasm for the militia and the regime was rooted in the politics of recognition. Thousands of peasants became *makouts* to be recognized as people of importance in national politics. Observing this reality in 1964, one U.S. official telegraphed:

MILITIA ORGANIZED BY DUVALIER REGIME SHOULD ALSO BE MENTIONED FOR POSSIBLE EFFECT ON RURAL POPULATION. MILITA UNITS FORMED AT LOCAL LEVEL THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO PROTECT 'DUVALIERIST REVOLUTION' HAVE TENDED TO GIVE SOME INDIVIDUALS SOME SENSE OF PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL LIFE WHICH COULD HAVE LONGER-TERM POLITICAL EFFECTS...<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Pè Camille in rural district of Ravine du Roche, Limbé, 9 June 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with André Georges in Limbé, June 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Incoming Telegram, 31 July 1964, LAB 10 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

The opportunity to increase in political stature attracted peasants to the militia who, in return, promised to defend the regime. Exchanging power for loyalty, the regime relied on its peasant-based militia to provide a massive shield of undersupplied peasant bodies that formed a bulwark around the dictatorship. *Makout* "consent" and defense helped the regime stay in power for almost three decades. Recognizing that his regime stood on the backs of *makouts*, Duvalier once remarked that the militia was the "permanence of his revolution... even though I disappear."<sup>43</sup> *Makouts* and peasant loyalists were the foundations of the regime as long as it kept up with its end of the bargain: giving power in exchange for loyalty.

### **From *Malheureux* to *Chèf* and the Politics of Terror**

Indeed, the recognition of peasants' personhood and their access to political privileges came with an awful price. For peasants, the decision to become a *makout* put them in a morally ambiguous position that sometimes called for murderous political actions in exchange for a freer life. However, some peasant correspondents urged that, if not a *makout*, alternatives to political freedom and political recognition of personhood were little. "You couldn't remain a 'hello' (civilian) because when a 'hello,' you were nothing," former *makout* Élie Marslen justified.<sup>44</sup> Local archival sources demonstrate how the civilian rural population was burdened by a locally repressive state. Ever since the U.S. occupation, peasants were dominated by a police state and penal system that outlawed their religious practices, harassed their independent labor, and criminalized their mobility.

For example, military soldiers and police arrested civilian peasants as vagabonds if they were caught not farming on the weekdays. "Long ago everyone worked...during the week young

---

<sup>43</sup> American Embassy to State Department, 8 April 1964, POL 15-1 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Élie Marslen of Camp Louise, 2015.

men did not promenade except on Saturday and Sunday or else the state would arrest you," explained one peasant in Grison-Garde.<sup>45</sup> Rare court records in Le Borgne reveal the continued prosecution of *vagabondage* (vagrancy). Previously a dormant post-emancipation law revived during the US occupation, *vagabondage* essentially criminalized mobility and sentenced those charged of the crime to months of imprisonment with hard labor (I found a partly damaged legal book in Borgne dated in 1907, which contains records of court proceedings prior to the U.S. occupation, and it does not mention a single case of *vagabondage*). The fact that *vagabondage* was enforced in the early years of the Duvalier regime shows the limitations of the regime's early populism of *justice sociale*, which promised political equality. As the regime transitioned from *justice sociale* to *makout* populism in the early 1960s, ordinary peasants in Borgne accused of *vagabondage* pleaded with judges in vernacular that eerily resembled the regime's discourse that included terms such *malheureux* (disempowered) and themes of peasant injustice.

On 30 October 1961, the peasant Exilus Saintilma replied to charges of *vagabondage*, "I'm not a *vagabond*, I'm a *malheureux* searching for work to earn my daily bread." Others included class exploitation in their defense. Sully Pierre, arrested for *vagabondage*, proclaimed in court, "There is something that is hard to understand about this country. The very big crush the very little."<sup>46</sup> Exantus Georges, in November, was arrested in his garden while harvesting coffee beans and brought to court to face charges of *vagabondage*. When the judge interrogated as to why he was arrested as a *vagabond*, Georges defiantly replied, "If arrested as such, it is because

---

<sup>45</sup> Interview with an unnamed peasant in Grison-Garde, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> "Je ne suis pas vagabond, je suis un malheureux cherchant du travail pour gagner mon pain quotidien" "Je ne suis pas vagabond...je travaillais comme un grand cultivateur si aujourd'hui je ne trouve pas de quoi à faire c'est pas de ma faute; c'est la volonté de Dieu...Dans ce pays, tout est mystère, il faut savoir vivre pour vivre pou être en bonne relation avec les gens de ce pays, et je pris vous dire que c'est ma malchance qui m'a amené ici." "Il y'a une chose que l'on ne comprend dans ce pays. Les plus grands foulent les plus petits." 1961 Simple Police 1961, 30 October 1961, TP, Le Borgne.

of pure injustice."<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the remarks of these persecuted peasants mirrored the discourses of the regime's pro-peasant populism of *justice sociale* for their rights. Nevertheless, Saintilma, Pierre, Garçontil, and Georges were tried as vagrants and sent to prison for convict labor, but their true crime was their audacity to move freely as they pleased. After being reinvigorated under the occupation, Duvalier finally wrote *vagabondage* out rural law in 1963 that finally that ended the repressive practice of extracting involuntary labor from peasants.<sup>48</sup> Still, peasants faced other forms of repression that were also legacies of U.S. intervention. For instance, peasants strove to avoid state predation from armed tax agents.

During the occupation, the Haitian government promulgated in 1924 the creation of the national tax bureau, *Administration Générale des Contributions* and maintained local offices throughout the provinces that were responsible for collecting taxes. Each local office (Fr: *impôts locatif*) was staffed with a single armed tax officer (Fr: *préposé*) and a tiny army of underling collectors (Fr: *percepteur*). These tax agents were nearly always outnumbered by the peasant population, in which they hunted down to tax. So, tax agents often utilized their own ties to rural communities and the circulating rumor mill in order to discover what taxes were not paid. Although this system was nowhere near efficient, and taxes were often evaded, tax officers kept up a menacing presence by harassing peasants. Under the Duvalier regime, tax agents pestered on that tightened peasant economic possibilities.

Following national law, tax agents targeted the peasant economy, religion, and leisure activities for the purpose of generating state revenue that rarely circulated back to the welfare of peasants. Thus, taxation had the effect of impeding on peasants' sense of economic opportunities and freedom. This may explain why peasants in the northwest region of Grand' Anse referred to

---

<sup>47</sup> "Si on m'arrêté ainsi, c'est par pure injustice." *Simple Police* 1961, 24 November 1961, TP, Le Borgne,

<sup>48</sup> *Code Rural Dr. François Duvalier*, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1963).

tax collectors as "gwo woch" or a huge rock that symbolized the toughness and rigidity of taxation that tumbled over the moral economy of the Haitian countryside.<sup>49</sup> For example, agents attempted to tax rural market women for vending the crops of their families' harvest in public market places. Under the cover of mountains and underdevelopment, however, peasant women attempted to market their agricultural production free from the taxation of state agents. As a form of resistance, rural market women set up clandestine markets where they surreptitiously vended merchandise. Although this served as a type of discreet protection, somehow the word still reached tax collectors regarding this evasion of taxes.

Rare tax records in Acul-du-Nord show how peasants were menaced by a taxing system that utilized police tactics and coercion to extract revenue from vulnerable peasants. In 1961, the stealthy market women in Acul-du-Nord were unable to escape the hawkish local tax collector:

*Il m'a été donné de constater qu'une pluralité de vendeurs de [sic] d'acheteurs se sont plu à organiser des marchés illicites dans les section rurales de votre commandement, ce qui, en effet, diminue les recettes de cette source. Je vous demande en l'occurrence, d'expédier les jours de Marché des Agents de Police sur dits lieux, lesquels, le case échéant, prendront des dispositions contre eux, ce vue de les porter à se divorcer avec leurs procédés nuisant aux intérêts d l'État.<sup>50</sup>*

Market women were the most subjugated class in Haiti, who often experienced state coercion, especially when concerning the market tax.

Living in the mountainous rural section of Mackary, Louisiane and her sister (though agreed to talk, refused to provide her name to the interviewer) recalled the arduous journey on foot to vend rural crops in the urban district Jacmel – a journey and task that took an entire day. They described how marketing took a cruel toll on the body, “when you leave on this route here to bring you all the way to Jacmel, when you return you're not a person anymore.” After the

---

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Maias in Bonbon, August 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Jean, *Préposé* to Corporal Chargé du l'Avant Poste de Acul du Nord, 10 February 1961, in folder C. Année, DGI/Impôts Locale de Acul.



rugged terrain taxed their bodies, market women would be taxed some more at the marketplace in Jacmel. “They [tax agents] used to make us experience misery, everywhere we turned we had to pay *kat* [ticketed tax], if you're with your mule they'll pass their hand on it [take it by the reins] and demand that you pay for it. You move ahead [in the market] they ask you to pay, you move even further they'll ask you to pay again.” Louisiane's sister interjected, however, “we fought them, they made us pay too much. We would fight them en route and say we're not paying at all.”<sup>51</sup> As men were arrested for their mobility, women were taxed for their mobile economic activity. Together, their freedom of leisure and religious practice were further menaced by armed tax agents.

*Gageure* (cockfighting games) was a leisure activity in the countryside, but became taxable occasion during the occupation (prior to U.S. invasion, *gageure* was outlawed). Participants and hosts of untaxed *gageure* games were subjected to arrest and imprisonment. On 10 March 1961, the Acul tax officer ordered the arrest of Émile Abraham from the rural section of Bas Acul because he organized a *gageure* without registering the game for taxation.<sup>52</sup> Circumstances were no different for other untaxed leisure activities in Acul. “It has come to my attention that certain delinquent taxpayers,” the irritated Acul tax agent wrote to the local army corporal in 4 October 1961, “have taken to reunions of games, of *spectacle public* [rural parties and *Vodou* ceremonies], all parties in the rural Sections under your commandment...” The tax

---

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Louisiane and her unnamed sister in the rural section of Mackary (or might be spelled Macquarie), February 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Jean, Préposé Contributions to Caporal des Forces Armées d'Haiti, 10 March 1961, DGI/Impôts Locatif, Acul-du-Nord.

officer ordered the corporal to suppress the tax evaders that caused a "problem to the interest of the state."<sup>53</sup>

It is noteworthy to mention that the state even taxed ceremonies associated with the popular African-derived religion of *Vodou*, whereas institutionalized religious practices rooted in European traditions such as Catholicism and Protestantism were not. In theory, *Vodou* ceremonies were outlawed even under the Duvalier dictatorship. But in practice *Vodou* ceremonies were officially sanctioned if the devotees paid a tax called *spectacle public* that was an official general tax on festive events. Put simply, untaxed communal ceremonies were prohibited. Some peasants held secret *Vodou* ceremonies but risked state retribution. On 27 May 1962, an Acul tax agent discovered that an unauthorized *Vodou* ceremony was soon in the making at "*habitation* 'Guilmaçou'" and wrote to the local corporal, "Presently, I request you to please put at my disposal the ministry of public law enforcement under your command: a soldier, a *chef de section* and auxiliary police force to put a stop to *spectacle public* consisting of prayers, dancing etc. whose host was not authorized by the tax office."<sup>54</sup> Armed tax agents and the army collaborated to extract taxation from peasants that was a nuisance to their economy and freedom. Thus, the undemocratic practices of the police state in the countryside compelled many peasants to join the VSN/*makout* militia.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

<sup>53</sup> "Il m'a été donné de constater que certains contribues indéclicats ont eu à tenir des réunions de jeux, de spectacles publics, de bals dans toutes les Sections rurales relevant de votre commandement...En vu remédier à cet état de chose, nuisent aux intérêts de l'Etat, vous voudrez bien passer ordres à vos subordonnes pour qu'aucune des réunions ci-dessus établies ne s'organise dans leur Section respective sans que les contribuables intéressés s'acquittent de leurs droits règlements prévus par la loi. See, Martin Jean, *Préposé* to Corporal Chargé du l'Avant Poste de Acul du Nord, 4 October 1961, in folder C. *Année*, DGI/Impôts Locale de Acul.

<sup>54</sup> "Par la présent, je vous demande de bien vouloir mettre à ma disposition le ministère des Agents de la Force Publique relevant de votre autorité: un soldat, le Chef de section rurale et ses Adjointes pour l'arrestation d'un spectacle public consistant en prières, danser etc et dont le tenancier ne s'est pas mis en règle avec le fisc." *Préposé* Acul to Caporal de Forces Armées d'Haiti cantonné en cette commune, 27 May 1962, in folder *Correspondance avec Collecteur*, DGI/Impôts Locale, Acul-du-Nord.

Seeking a way to defend themselves, peasants joined the *makouts* for protection. One peasant referred to such *makouts* as "*malere pè presyon*" or *malheureux* fearful of pressure. Indeed, peasants had long seen themselves as *malheureux* [disempowered] but many became "*chèf*" in the Duvalier years to shield themselves from state predation and repression. One *makout* in the section of Bokozel of Artibonite, for example, carved the letter VSN into a wooden plank and nailed the sign to his front gate of his family compound or *lakou*. This VSN sign served to warn lurking state officials that relatives and friends living inside the *lakou* were under *makout* protection.<sup>55</sup> Other *makouts* extended their protection to incorporate their entire communities.

Brining peasants under *makout* protection created tensions between the militia and state agents. In a rural section of Soufrière located in Acul, a tax officer complained about local *makouts* obstructing tax collection on leisure activities and rural parties which was a category that included *Vodou* ceremonies. "*Miliciens...* of this region enjoy inculcating the *habitants* [peasants] with the spirit of embezzlement," the tax agent in 1964 bitterly complained to superiors. Soufrière *makouts* were advocating tax evasion, "They let them [peasants] understand that the Government of the Republic henceforth cancels the collection of taxes notably *Spectacle Public* [*Vodou* ceremonies and rural parties], card game of chance, slaughterhouse fees etc. ... this has paralyzed the submission of Funds." The tax officer acknowledged that the *makouts* were only encouraging what peasants had already a propensity to act against, "This disturbance has left the wrong feelings in the minds [*l'esprit*] of the peasants [*paysans*], since it is manner in

---

<sup>55</sup> Interview with an unnamed peasant in Bokozel, 2014.

which they move voluntarily.”<sup>56</sup> Many *makouts* were peasants and protected their communities against repressive state officials.

This means that, while the militia defended the position of the regime, *makouts* simultaneously militated against the local tentacles of the regime. This contradiction was the product of the Duvalier regime neglecting to turn its pro-peasant populism of *justice sociale* into meaningful law and practice in all levels of government. Instead, the regime created a peasant-based militia whose rural members utilized their status to defend peasant communities from a predatory state. *Makouts* were in constant tensions with local state agents harassing peasants. One former *makout* shared the following story:

My aunt was arrested because she put coffee on the ground [in violation of laws on coffee preparation]. I wasn't present during the incident that day. When the state agronomist went up to my rural section of Laurent and had her arrested, I nor the other stronger ones [more influential *makouts*] were there. A *jakoma* (fresh militia recruit), you know who wasn't yet strong but still was a *chêf* was told that the state arrested my aunt. He dropped his farming and ran to where she was. And he yelled out to her stop and return. She replied she could not because she was under arrest but he cried out again to her to return. And she did. He instructed her to take back the coffee and she took back the coffee. And he told her to go back home and eat. And she did. The agronomist and the rural police just stood there and couldn't do anything because the *tonton makout* had priority [*priòyite*; Fr. *priorité*].<sup>57</sup>

This story is an example of how *makouts* negotiated between their ties with the state and the community. Indeed, *makouts* often showed solidarity with kin and friends caught in the grasp of a predatory police state.

---

<sup>56</sup> "Depuis quelques mois les Membres des différents groupements politiques: Miliciens, Rempart, Syndicat de cette région se plaisent à inculquer aux habitants l'esprit de malversation." "Ils leur laissent entendre que le Gouvernement de la République annule désormais le perception des taxes notamment les Spectacles Publics et les jeux de hasard, les droits d'abattage etc...cela paralyse le rentrée des Fonds. "Cette perturbation a laissé de mauvais sentiments dans l'esprit des paysans, car ceux-ci à la manière d'une que l'on meut à volonté." "Je me fais l'impérieux devoir de vous faire cet important rapport soit pour en plaindre aux Chefs respectifs de ces groupements, soit pour faire organiser au dit marché par les autorités locales un Meeting ayant pour but diffuser de l'esprit des masses paysannes la mauvais conception qui leur a été inculqués par ces gens pervers." See, Préposé J. Arnold Thimoléon to Collecteur des Contributions Cap-Haitien, 7 September 1964 in folder titled *Correspondance Avec Collecteur*, DGI Acul Du Nord.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with André Georges in Limbé, June 2015. Some examples of arrest for violating coffee preparation laws can be found in Dondon's court records. Merceus Pierre and Madame Revilus Préval were charged for leaving coffee cherries on the ground to dry. See 1965 Simple Police, 4 November 1966, TP, Dondon.

Rural *makouts*, in particular, were part of peasant communities and maintained solidarity with those who worked the land and sold their harvest in order to make a living. The notion of *travay tè* or working the land did not merely describe farm labor but an ideology that forged community ties. For some peasants, *travay tè* bounded Haitians together so tightly that it became commensurate with nationalism. "I'm Haitian, I work the land," explained Immacula Honarat of Anse-à-Foleur.<sup>58</sup> Haiti was a nation of predominantly peasants so *travay tè* was not simply a marker that distinguished their economic class [and would not be an accurate one at that] but also a way of seeing the world that created local solidarity. This solidarity led to the expectation from peasants that local *makouts* would behave differently from urban *makouts*.

One rural denizen in Abricots, located in the southwestern peninsula, expressed that local *makouts* "didn't do harm, it was *milisyen* in Port-au-Prince that did harm. You can't harm peasants, you'll always pay for it."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, local solidarities sometimes ran so deep that it often created regional divides among *makouts*. One week in March 1963, for example, an argument broke out in the province of Gonaïves between the local militia and visiting *makouts* from Port-au-Prince. One U.S. official reported what followed, "The argument led to the shooting of one of the Gonaïves militia by the group from Port-au-Prince and subsequently to their own deaths at the hands of a mob."<sup>60</sup> The local population of Gonaïves, in defense of the local militia, killed *makouts* from the capital.

Sometimes *makout* local solidarities trumped the interests of the central government. Around June 1964, Duvalier held a constitutional referendum that would make him "President for Life." However, rural denizens and *makouts* living in the northern offshore island of La

---

<sup>58</sup> Interview with a Immacula Honorat in Anse-à-Foleur, 2015

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a rural denizen in Abricots, August 2015.

<sup>60</sup> American Embassy in Port-au-Prince to Department of State, 10 March 1963, POL 2-1 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

Torture risked sabotaging the local referendum because they were involved in a conflict with a local army officer named Charles Lefère. On the July 1, the army commander Henri Namphy telegraphed Duvalier the following:

Recall your Excellence the unworthy behavior of officer Charles Lefère in Latorture constantly in shock with VSN and population following report already done. Stop. New incidents 5 days of elections and this week with VSN who refused any collaboration and with good reason. Solicit your Excellency's removal of this officer for collective security [of] La Torture.<sup>61</sup>

The short telegram to Duvalier did not provide enough details to understand what exactly sparked tensions between military officer Lefère and *makouts*/local population in La Torture. Nonetheless, we see that local solidarities brought *makouts* and rural denizens together to confront the traditionally abusive military that almost jeopardized Duvalier's local efforts to reelect himself into the presidency until his death. Duvalier succeeded in his national agenda to become President for Life, but this position had to coexist with locally-based *makout* activities that militated against the regime's interest.

Indeed, *makout* activities were not only rooted in the nation, but also rooted in their localities. Militia sensibilities to communal interest derived from collective notions of morality that had been stitched and constantly reworked over time. Aside from making occasional trips to the capital and attending local weekly militia meetings, marches, patrols, and training, many rural *makouts* scraped the earth with machetes searching for existence (*chèche lavi*) as most ordinary rural women, men, and children performed. Working the land also yielded uncertainty

---

<sup>61</sup> "Rappelle à votre excellence comportement indigne officier Charles Lefère à latorture constamment en choc avec VSN et population suivant rapport déjà fait. Stop. Nouveaux incidents 5 jour des élections et cette semaine avec VSN qui ont refusé toute collaboration et avec raison. Sollicité de votre Excellence déplacement de cet officier pour sécurité collective La Torture."

Henri Namphy to Son Excellence Dr. François Duvalier, 1 July 1964, Box 4, folder Maj. General Henri Namphy/Correspondences Feb-May 1984, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

created by natural and human forces. To shore up against the unforeseen natural disasters, peasants learned and passed on how to strike up fellowship with kin, friends, neighbors, local elites, and the supernatural. The peasant culture of dependency created practices and techniques that could ameliorate the ferocity of the unpredictable (e.g., hurricanes, sickness, crop failure, and bad luck). For the more discernible problems such as local state repression, ordinary peasants in the Duvalier era became *makouts* to protect their communities against local state abuse.

For example, *makouts* sometimes assisted market women in resisting unfair or abusive tax collection because taxation harmed profits accrued by vending women and disrupted their capacity to share what they had earned with needy relatives and friends that were bound up together by the moral economy of the Haitian countryside. For rural *makouts*, market taxes harmed household economies. *Tonton makouts* argued that their relatives and others covered under their notion of protection should not be taxed at the market that predicated on the *makout* "social contract" with the Duvalier state. That is, *makouts* gave free voluntary service to the regime in exchange for state privileges that included tax exemption.

Rural *makouts* asserted that tax evasion was a form of recompense for being unpaid members of the VSN militia. One former *makout* of Limbé explains: "People used to pay a *kat* (ticketed market tax). It could be any little item brought to the market, a *kat* had to be paid...Like me, I'm a *chèf* and I send my wife to the market but we don't have much and we have to pay a tax.... We said this could not go on. I'm not paid and the little that I have is going to be taxed. No we revolted this could not go on."<sup>62</sup> Archival records show an unusual occurrence of cases in which *makouts* defended market women from local state predation. In 1963, rural police officers

---

<sup>62</sup> Interview with peasant in Limbé, June 2015.

in the border town Thomassique spotted a group of “*contrebandier*” or market women moving untaxed merchandise of Dominican providence between the rural sections of Savanna Mulâtre and Nolaquite. “Among them two *miliciens*,” one police agent reported, “who after seeing the police, began fighting the two police agents... and the others [*contrebandier*] had time to take flight.”<sup>63</sup> On a Sunday morning in 1965, Sainte Thérèse Daniel left her parents home in a rural section of Dondon to transport freshly harvested cabbage to the city of Cap-Haitien. Daniel was stopped on her path by a tax agent claiming to have received orders to destroy bad [*piques*] cabbage. When Daniel protested, the tax agent threatened that either she lose her life or her cabbage. She wisely chose the latter and her cabbage was destroyed. But she took her complaint to three “*miliciens*” who arrested the tax agent.<sup>64</sup> The unofficial tax agent was jailed and forced to recompense the lost value of Daniel’s cabbage and fees that she had to pay to the police to hold him custody before the trial.

*Makout* efforts to evade taxes sometimes spurred revolts and violent conflict with state agents. These forms of violence were part of *makout* terror, but terror employed against the state. In 1966, market women in Gonaives openly resisted paying market fees to a tax officer and local *makouts* rushed to their side. The anti-tax action evolved into a popular revolt encompassing both market women and *makouts* against the state. Duvalier sent his presidential guard to suppress the revolt and reorganized Gonaives’ militia in retaliation for their

---

<sup>63</sup> Interrogatoire de l’Agent de Police Rurale Isidor Abraham, Commandant du District to Commandant du Département Militaire du Centre 31 May 1963, find in the police dossier of Joseph Mettellus, folder 11963, FAd’H, ANH, PauP.

<sup>64</sup> And during court it was revealed that the tax agent may have been informally appointed and rumored to be a sexual predator who preyed on market women. The tax agent mentioned in court that he was appointed by the tax office and was ordered by the “*Chef du Syndicat*” to survey cabbage entering Acul. 1965 *Simple Police*, 11 June 1965, TB, Dondon.



collaboration with market women in the tax revolt.<sup>65</sup> In 1967, Telius Audalus accompanied by Estasse Joseph who was in militia uniform stabbed a tax officer trying to collect taxes in Soufrière's market. The *makout* Estasse was arrested and jailed but, according to Acul tax officials, was released from prison on the order of the local "*chef de la milice*" without undergoing legal judgment.<sup>66</sup> On 7 April 1969, the prefect of Mirebalais reported to Duvalier the names of *makouts* "Brunevil Dulormé V.S.N." and "Tardieu Clermont V.SN." among the participants in *habitation* Tizeau of Cazale who rose up in rebellion against the regime that partly originated from local resistance to market and irrigation taxes. The regime dispatched *makouts* from another region to help squash the rebellion in Cazale that led to the 1969 Peasant massacre.<sup>67</sup> Avoiding dependency relationships with male *makouts*, some market women enlisted into the militia to enjoy privileges that included the evasion of market taxes.<sup>68</sup> In sum, *makouts* collaborated with and absorbed members of their rural communities to resist taxation that harmed the moral economy of the Haitian countryside.

*Makouts* also showed solidarity to agricultural workers in labor conflict with powerful foreign industrialists operating in Haiti. In fact, many agricultural labor unions were pro-Duvalier organizations,<sup>69</sup> and others converted into *makout* lodges while continuing to advocate

---

<sup>65</sup> American Embassy in Port-au-Prince to State Department, 16 October 1966, POL 2-1 HAI, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>66</sup> Préposé des Contribution de l'Acul-du-Nord to Collecteur des Contributions, Cap Haïtien, 17 May 1967, DGI/Impôts Locale, Acul-du-Nord.

<sup>67</sup> Franck Geffrard, Prefect to Chef Supérieur et Effectif des Forces Armées et des volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale (Duvalier), 7 April 1960; this letter was reprinted in the following source, "1969: toute la vérité sur L'horrible massacre de Cazale," L'Union, 4 September 1991, Haiti Fights against Impunity, <http://www.haitiluttecontre-impunite.org/texts/53?locale=en>.

<sup>68</sup> Desir's mother was a market women and also member of the VSN militia. Interview with Floreine Desir in Limbé, June 2015.

<sup>69</sup> In June 1961, for example, union leaders from Grand Rivière du Nord, Bahun, and Grand Pré helped organized a mass rally along with other political bosses in honor of "*Son Excellence le Président de la République*." See, *RAPPORT DU JOURS DU DEPARTEMENT MILITAIRES DU NORD*, 14 June 1961, 12079, FAd'H, ANH, PauP. Other unions were created with the explicit intent of operating in the interest of the Duvalier regime. On 23 June 1961, for example, the *Parti Syndical de Pignon* in central plateau region was formed to "*d'épauler la politique de*

for labor rights. Many labor unions, especially in the northern zones, subsequently coalesced with the *makout* militia.<sup>70</sup> This was particularly true in northeast Haiti. "One of the interesting features of Duvalierism in northeastern Haiti," one U.S. foreign officer reported to Washington in the sixties, "is the complete control of the principal labor federation in that area by the Civil Militia, President Duvalier's para-military band of political activists." These VSN militia-northeast labor unions led two labor strikes against U.S.-owned sisal plantations for better wages.

During one union-*makout* strike in May 1962, the *makout* and prefect Berthelus Pierre taunted U.S. managers of the Dauphin Plantation in Fort Liberté: "You are not so powerful, you couldn't even get Castro out of Cuba." Also participating in the labor strike, and upon hearing a U.S. manager concede to union demands for holiday pay but under certain conditions, another *makout* interrupted, "they would always get this holiday pay under any condition as Dr. Duvalier would be President forever." The *makout*-union won their strike against Dauphin Plantation that strengthened local support for the militia and the regime. U.S. officials reported, "As a result of the labor factory in the disputes provoked...the militia-union leaders and President Duvalier have enjoyed a wave of popularity among the plantation employees."<sup>71</sup> Incidents such as these

---

*Son Excellence le Docteur François Duvalier*" (shoulder the politics of His Excellency the Doctor François Duvalier). See, Chêf d'Etat Major Général to François Duvalier, 26 June 1961, Rapport journaliers de différents militaires du pays, 12079, ANH, PauP. On 13 January 1962, *l'Union des Travailleurs* in Jacmel where it organized a mass rally in "l'honneur de son Excellence, le Président François Duvalier." See, "Meeting organise par l'Union des Travailleurs de Jacmel," 19 January 1962, *Le Nouvelliste*. Labor union activities began to depart from labor activism and resemble the activities of the tonton makout militia. Unions were beginning to utilize their privileges that were in many ways anti-state resembling the VSN militia. See, Préfet Jean Valbrun to Collecteurs des Contribution en Ville, 8 August 1962, DGI in Acul du Nord.

<sup>70</sup>The former *sendika* Élie Maslen of Camp Louise suggest that unionist were the underlings of the VSN militia. Both *milisyen* and *sendika* wore the same uniform. When I asked Maslen to describe the relationship between the *tonton makouts* and *syndika*, he replied "tankou chef seksyon te gen adjwen, makout te gen syndika." Just like how the rural chief of police had an auxiliary force so did the *makout* have the *sendika*. Marslen was suggesting that the *sendika* and militia were part of the same political force affiliated with dictatorship. Interview with Élie Marslen of Camp Louise in Acul-du-Nord, 22 September 2013.

<sup>71</sup> This U.S. report was prompted by makout-led labor strikes in the northeast that utilized terror tactics intimidate American plantation managers. On 26 May 1962, the *Fédération de Travailleurs et Ouvriers du Nord-Est* led a labor strike on the U.S.-owned sisal producing Dauphin Plantation located in Fort-Liberté. Yet the *Fédération* comprised

generated support for the *makout* militia and, by extension, for the regime as well; however, their actions were often independent of regime directives. Rather, many *makout* acts of protections extended to members of their community derived in part from ideas and customs of local solidarity that long governed social interaction in the Haitian countryside.

\*\*\*\*\*

Peasants becoming *makouts* did not only entail defending communal interests, but also personal ambitions for power. Peasants did not merely join the *makouts* to protect themselves and their communities from a repressive state. *Makouts* also endeavored to become local political bosses. Obtaining power for some *makouts* centered on geographic strategy. One former *makout* who lived in a rural section traveled to the nearest major city, Cap Haitien, to enlist into the VSN

---

members of the local makout militia. Clubs and machetes in hand, members of the *Fédération* thronged the floors of the plantation and demanded that Dauphin managers pay their workers holiday-pay. The strike drew local political officials who were also members of the militia. One such VSN was the local prefect Berthelus Pierre who arrived at the plantation and berated the manager connections to Washington. "You are not so powerful," Pierre reportedly shouted to American managers, "you couldn't even get Castro out of Cuba." Another 160 tonton makouts marched around the plantation's airfield before a crowd of five to six hundred peasants. Negotiations among the *Fédération*, government officials, and plantation managers were undertaken within this hostile climate. Finally, the American manager conceded to the demands of the workers and implied that holiday pay might not be available next year. But one tonton makout interjected "they would always get this holiday pay under any condition as Dr. Duvalier would be President forever." After these tonton makouts won subsequent labor disputes, the managers and foreign officers also recognized the political capital of this event for the Duvalier regime, "As a result of the labor factory in the disputes provoked...the militia-union leaders and President Duvalier have enjoyed a wave of popularity among the plantation employees." See, "Labor Trouble at the Dauphin Sisal Plantation," June 15, 1962, 838.062/6-1562. Not all unions in the northeast were successful in winning over state support in their activism for better wages. Following the 26 May strike at Dauphin, labor union-militia of Trou du Nord threatened to strike in the neighboring American-owned plantation, Haitian Agricultural Cooperation (HACOR). The plantation manager Donald Marek reported that the magistrate of the town Morin Salvant and Prefect Pierre had been causing trouble on his plantation. In May, Salvant gave "Anti-American" speeches in the farming villages and began to make "exorbitant demands" on the company regarding wages. Marek would have none of it and "took a tougher line and made no concessions to the union." Marek took his case directly to the Ministry of Labor, and consequently, both Marek and Salvant were summoned to Port-au-Prince. Salvant was the magistrate of the town and a recognized VSN. Salvant was perhaps expecting support from the government given the success of his VSN counterparts in the neighboring Dauphin plantation. But once in the minister's office, Kersaint and Marek scolded Salvant for his actions. Kersaint read Salvant the "Riot Act" and sternly reminded the magistrate of the proper conduct of a civic official. The minister then warned Salvant, "this is the Republic of Haiti, not the Republic of La Trou." In one breath, the minister admonished the tonton makout for not acting on behalf of the state, but acting in the interest of local politics in northeast Haiti. See, "Labor Trouble at the HACOR Sisal Plantation" 25 June 1962, 838.06/6-2562, RG 58, NARA, College Park, Maryland. In response to the what was probably independent makout labor activism in the northeast, beginning in August, Duvalier reorganized the hierarchy of the northeast VSN. See, "Political and Labor Developments in the Northeast," 12 August 1962, 838.062/87262, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

militia where political power was most concentrated in the region. The former *makout* reasoned, "I entered the militia in the city to be *chêf* over all the *milisyen* (militia person) in the backcountry."<sup>72</sup>

*Makouts* achieved the position of *chêf* or local boss by either replacing or joining the ranks of local leading figures. These figures were usually part of the militarized police state that preyed on peasants. Thus, *makouts*, who were already a contradicting body, moved with and against repressive state agents depending on the circumstances. For example, in order to establish local dominance, some *makouts* challenged the authority of the *chef de section* and rural police officers that were traditionally the most influential figures in rural districts. "The *chêf seksyon* [Fr: *chef de section*] did not want to see *milisyen* but *milisyen* had all the power," the former *makout* Tanis of Gotier boasted.<sup>73</sup> According to Ton Tatou, "when I was a *milisyen*, my friend, we had power.... Whatever *chêf* comes here, it could even be an *officer* [he voiced with emphasis] that arrives that comes to do something... if their intentions were bad, beatings would fall upon them."<sup>74</sup> In June 1962, the police *chef de section* Lunor M. Metellus of Brostage in Dondon took affront to local *makouts* arresting his brother. Metellus had his brother released and, according to a military report, arrested some "*miliciens*" in retaliation.

The militia was much too early in its development stages for Metellus to discern its growing power and reportedly scoffed at them during a related court case, "*la Milice* [militia] is not worth anything." *Tonton makouts* in the rural section of Brostage were beginning to see things differently. As tensions escalated, Metellus' brother was captured and roped by *makouts*

---

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Louis Nicolas in *habitation* Galmant du Plat, Quartier Morin, 23 May 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Tanis in the rural section Gotier, Jean Rabel, 29 November 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with peasant in the rural district Camp Louise, Acul-du-Nord, 2015.

who "almost beat him to death." By August, the military discharged Metellus "to restore calm in the section."<sup>75</sup>

In other instances, *makouts* simply collaborated with the rural police and the local political status quo. The former *makout* Camille remembered that he and fellow members of the local militia worked together with their local *chef de section*, Hèlvé Jean.<sup>76</sup> *Makouts* held so much power that some got rural police officers off the hook in dire circumstances when it came to their superiors. For instance, the former *makout* Nicolas successfully ordered army soldiers to release two jailed rural police officers from the military prison in Quartier Morin.<sup>77</sup> Whether *makouts* competed or collaborated with the police, becoming a local political boss held much more power.

When joining the ranks of oppressors, *makouts* became oppressors themselves. For example, some *makouts* extorted fellow peasants to enrich themselves, which resembled the very abuses committed by state agents that some *makouts* claimed to be resisting. After Duvalier reinforced codes against tree cutting, for example, one *makout* peasant of Gotier, an area now nearly deforested, admitted that he charged peasants a fee to continue falling trees for charcoal to sell in urban centers.<sup>78</sup> The former *makout* Coeur Aimable of Limbé remembers that some members of the militia in nearby rural districts charged peasants a fee for retrieving captured

---

<sup>75</sup> Commandant du Département to CHEMG in *L'agent de la police Martin Lunor Metellus, Dossiers de renvoi de militaire (faut official) et de police rurale 1960-1977*, 11942, ANH, PauP.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Pere Camille in rural district of Ravine du Roche, Limbé, 9 June 2016

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Louis Nicolas in the *habitation* Galmant du Plat, Quartier Morin, 23 May 2015.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Tannis of Gotier, 2013. Charged with falling trees without authorization could land peasants in jail and compelled to pay fines. In 1965, José of Acul-du-Nord, for example, was charged for violating Duvalier's code rural articles 79, 86, and 225 related to tree cutting. José was sentenced to one month in jail and had to pay a total of thirty *gourdes* in fines or face another month of imprisonment. 1965 Simple Police, 27 September 1965, TP, Acul-du-Nord.

farm animals from the rural police – instead of freely helping a fellow peasant out of a jam with the authorities.<sup>79</sup>

Other *makouts* employed their authority to settle scores. In December 1961, the "milicien" Antoine Duvivier took the seamstress Noémie Homère to court in Borgne for "gravely insulting" him during a dispute over rumors. Duvivier recounted to the judge, "The last injurious words she launched at me [was that] if it were not for my role as *milicien*, we would be at serious odds [*avoir de mailles à partir*]." Duvivier politely threatened, "but in my kindness, I judged it good to formulate my complaint in front of the law." The *makout* Duvivier implied that he chose avenging his harmed ego through institutional means than more violent alternatives associated with the *makouts*. The accused Homère was fined four *gourdes* and sentenced to a month in prison.<sup>80</sup> Even though no apparent life was taken, Duvivier employed other tactics that were nonetheless forceful, intimidating, and punitive—however more innocuous it may seem than violent terror.

These power trips were the product of political ambitions at the expense of local solidarities. Though a powerful ideology that brought peasants together, local solidarities did not serve as enough of a buffer to prevent *makouts* from turning their tactics of terror against those they lived nearby or knew intimately. These acts of terror, however, rarely appear random but rather linked to local conflict. Local strife varied and so *makout* terror manifested in various ways according to circumstance. For instance, in Borgne around 1964, local officials gave the

---

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Coeur Aimable in Limbé, 10 June 2016.

<sup>80</sup> 1961 Simple Police, 14 December 1961, TP de Borgne. And Duvivier seemed to prefer legal retribution over violent terror. Just thirteen days before, Duvivier was in court testifying against the peasant François Cadet. When Cadet was held under contempt in court for insulting a judge, Duvivier attempted to arrest him. But Cadet fought back and punched the Makout. Duvivier brought Cadet in court was recorded to have said, "Being a *milicien* in service of the Government, I demand that François Cadet be condemned conforming to the law for having committed an assault." Cadet was sentenced to a month in prison and had to pay fines. Duvivier was on a power trip. 1961 Simple Police, 1 December 1961, TP, Le Borgne.

peasant Cherenfant Chérélus the task to eliminate undomesticated pigs roaming about Borgne. When he killed the pig that was owned by a person with ties to the *makout*, Chérélus was confronted by local *makouts* and a fight broke out. On 5 November, Chérélus was dragged into court and accused of assaulting local "*miliciens*." But Chérélus asserted that he was merely defending himself against a merciless attack by his "*milicien*" accusers – an attack that lasted until the militia commander called off the beating. "If it weren't for the intervention of Dieudonné François Commander of the VSN," Chérélus sighed in court, "I would have been found dead."<sup>81</sup>

Other *makout* conflicts with ordinary peasants were related to disagreements regarding informal contracts that dealt with sharecropping. In May 1965, the *makout* Vilius Samour was supposedly bewildered when he discovered on his 3.15 acre farm Ephéner Vénelon harvesting malanga (taro root). Samour later testified in court that Vénelon was previously entitled to half of its harvest (a half and half sharecropping agreement called *demwatye* or *de moitié*), but his terms had expired by the time of harvest season. The *makout* Samour arrested Vénelon and had him jailed. In court, Vénelon acknowledged that his sharecropping term had expired by the time of harvest but he argued that he planted the malanga before the expiration and that sickness delayed him from reaping what he sowed on time. Thus, Vénelon had a legitimate reason, at least within the scope of peasant moral codes, to harvest his crops beyond the timeframe of his agreement with Vilius.

Nevertheless, Vénelon allowed Vilius to arrest and subjected him to multiple beatings because, as the former testified in court, "It is in his [Vilius'] role in *Volontaire Milice Civil* that he exercise against me: I found it impossible to disobey his orders." Although Vénelon was

---

<sup>81</sup> 1965 Simple Police, 5 February 1965, TP, Le Borgne.

defenseless against Vilius' *makout* status, the courts deviated from notions of authority exercised by the Duvalier regime and ruled based on popular notions of community behavior. Dondon's judge of peace, ignoring the privileges of the *makouts* and probably more influenced by the moral codes of rural society, freed Vénelon and dismissed the charges.<sup>82</sup>

In other instances, intimate family conflict prompted *makout* terror. In October 1965, Saintalès Saimbert attempted to stop her sister, Dieusèlie Saimbert, from violently disciplining her nephew. Dieusèlie turned her violence to her sympathetic sister, Saintalès. Then, Dieusèlie's partner dragged Saintalès to the "V.S.N. Alphonse Pierre." Saintalès later testified in court that the *makout* Pierre, "bound my two hands and my two feet, thrust me unto to the ground, and administered a whipping...without concern of the wounds already caused by the mistreatment of my sister."<sup>83</sup> All these instances show that the politics of *makout* terror, although powerful, did not necessarily defy local ideologies of solidarity; instead the two coexisted.

Indeed, terror sometimes rivaled moral codes produced over time by collectively "working the land." And some *makouts* could not circumvent local rules on how to live among their neighbors. *Makouts* caught stealing crops or farm animals from ordinary peasants, which theft being one of the most morally offensive crimes in the countryside, were arrested by fellow *makouts*. One Sunday night in February 1965, Adelka François of *habitation* Cadush spotted Hélvétus Jean in her garden stealing plantains. But Jean was no ordinary civilian but a member of the militia. So she proceeded to do the following: "I left my garden to search for a *volontaire* [VSN] in the area to arrest Jean." That is, she sought out neighboring *makouts* to arrest their

---

<sup>82</sup> "Ce sont ces qualités de Volontaires de la Milice Civile qu'il exerçait contre moi: Je me trouvais alors dans l'impossibilité de ne pas obéir à ces ordres." 1965 Simple Police, 20 May 1965, TB, Dondon.

<sup>83</sup> "Alphonse Pierre V.S.N. ayant ligoté me dieux mains, et me deux pieds, me jeter par terre et m'administra une volée à la aide d'un fouet... sans se soucier de la blessure que les maltraitements de ma sœur." 1965 Simple Police, 25 October 1965, TP, Dondon.



fellow *makout* for stealing. Adelka found two *makouts* to help stake out her garden that very night to see if Jean would return. He did at four o'clock in the morning. "Since the said Hélyvélus Jean was a *milicien*," Adelka later testified in Quartier Morin's court of peace, "his brothers [meaning fellow *makouts*] Magloire and Richmond Mondésir arrested him and brought him to the VSN Bureau in Cadush." Revealing what she actually meant by "his brothers," Jean stated in court: "two *miliciens de Cadush* proceeded with my arrest..." Jean was sentenced to five months in jail.<sup>84</sup> In Cadush, moral disdain towards stealing united *makouts* and ordinary peasants against alleged thieves even if the accused was part of the powerful *makouts*.

In spite of *makout* tensions with the population, local solidarities remained constant because it was what Axel Honneth calls the "moral grammar" (or structure) of subjective and communal formation. Worked and reworked overtime, local rural solidarities were more present to peasants than the state itself. *Makouts* as state actors could not merely impose themselves on this moral structure but had to work themselves into it. And even so, *makouts* could never receive complete moral approval because *makouts*, though they sometimes defended peasants, were also tied to the central state which made them vulnerable to the corrupting, megalomaniac tendencies of power. In other words, *makouts* occupied a morally ambiguous position where they had one foot in local communities and the other in the realm of state power. This is why *makouts* received ambivalent support from peasants.

The elderly peasant Lemanoit "Zo" Pierre explained: "They had power. They were *makouts*. Those who were not good sided with the state and big elites. Those who were *malere*

---

<sup>84</sup> "Dimanche vers le sise [sic] heure du soir en arrosant mon jardin, j'entendis coupé une banane je m'approchais clandestinement pour voir qui travail dans le jardin brusquement j'apprenais le nommé Hélyvélus Jean, tout de nuit je laisse le jardin, pour aller chercher des volontaire de l'endroit pour procéder à l'arrestation du nommé Hélyvélus Jean plus haut-cité. Immédiatement ils venaient a mon aides...Comme se nommé Hélyvélus Jean était son milicien, ces [sic] frères...Magloire, Richard Mondesir procédèrent à son arrestation et le conduisaient au bureau des V.S.N de Cadush..." "deux miliciens de Cadush procéderaient à mon arrestation et me conduire au bureau des V.S.N. de Cadush..." 1965 Simple Police, 10 February 1965, TP, Quartier Morin.

had their own understandable reasons [*gen rezon*].”<sup>85</sup> Zo saw *malheureux* peasants enlisting to defend their rights as a just reason for joining the *makouts*, whereas others who sought to reenact the power of local state agents and bosses were less credible. Most dichotomies are unreliable for social analyses because they do not take into account the nuances of human action. The same goes for “the good *makout*” versus “the bad *makout*” model. Yet, if dichotomies are limited to us as analyst than they also limited the peasant’s view. Instead of a more comprehensive understanding of Duvalier’s perverse system of control, peasants often reached for the more locally-based characterizations of a few bad rotten *makouts*. Who can blame them, peasants spent most their time knowing little about a state that did very little for them. All what peasants had was the *makouts* and, for good or bad, they joined or relied on the militia to scale back the repressive tendencies of the police state that was led by the U.S.-backed military. Thus, Duvalier and peasants shared a common interest in ameliorating the influence of the army.

### **The Conclusion: The Continuity of the Makouts**

By the late sixties, *tonton makouts* played a key role in curbing the political dominance of the military. Enjoying power beyond challenge since U.S. intervention, the military, under Duvalier and the *makouts*, found themselves in a very weak position. In 1968, a U.S. official reported, “the Haitian Armed Forces themselves no longer pose an institutional threat to the Duvalier regime as they did in the late 1950s when the president created the VSN as a counterforce to an unfriendly military establishment.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, this meant that the *makouts* were the foundations of the regime’s power. “Duvalier has managed, sometime even by

---

<sup>85</sup>Interview with Lemanait “Zo” Pierre in rural section Lacoma, Jean Rabel, 27 November 2013.

<sup>86</sup>“Recent Political-Military Developments in Cap Haitien,” 10 November 1968, POL 2-1, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

accident," a U.S. official reported to Washington, after given a rare opportunity in 1968 to tour the northwest province, "a primitive polity of some political structures which serve as stabilizing elements." Because given unusual access into the countryside, which foreign officers were rarely able to do, this U.S. official observed that the militia was fundamental to the regime's "stability."<sup>87</sup>

In addition, this U.S. official realized that local solidarities between *makouts* and peasants against the military played an important role in, simultaneously, providing the regime with popular consent and protecting the regime from military intrigue:

The best example involves the VSN, popularly labeled Ton Ton Macoutes and believed to be thugs. While this description may be valid in Port-au-Prince, in the Northwest it is misleading. On the contrary, the regular army personnel on a short assignment in an isolated town tend more to be thugs. The militiamen are natives of the town in which they serve and do not happily watch army strangers abuse their fellow townspeople. In confrontation with the outside world, the Haitian's already extended concept of the family can easily be extended to include their entire town. For the most part, the VSN forms a buffer between a sort of occupying force and the townspeople and peasants. This is not to ignore that VSN members take advantage of their position vis-a-vis others in the town. It is worth emphasizing that the interaction of the Army, the Militia and the local political officials produces a definite if somewhat tenuous equilibrium between competing power groups in many localities with each group having at least one line into the [National] Palace.<sup>88</sup>

The fundamental insight of these remarks was correct, but did not emphasize enough the influential role of the militia in maintaining the regime. *Tonton makouts* did not merely function as one group on a terrain replete with other competing groups that offset each other to the detriment of collective struggles and to the advantage of sustaining the Duvalier state. Rather, enlistment of the rural masses into a large armed following helped extend the regime's influence into the quite remote northwest peninsula which was previously dominated by the local political elites and army soldiers. In this way, the presence of the militia made the local political structure

---

<sup>87</sup> "Trip Report: Northwest Department of Haiti," 29 December 1968, POL 2-1, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

and the army more amenable to the central state. The Duvalier regime, above all, depended on the militia for centralizing control. Camille, a former *makout*, could not have not stated it more clearly when he declared, "*la milice* supervised Duvalier's power."<sup>89</sup> In return, *tonton makouts* demanded political power that checked local state and military abuse. They also sought special privileges that depended upon their circumstances.

Some peasants become *makouts* to fend for their interests in everyday interactions and confrontations with elements of political, state, and class power. While involved in a court case over a dispute of a cow, one Torbeck peasant joined the militia to seek an advantage.<sup>90</sup> This might explain why on 22 August 1969 the prosecutor in Jacmel, regarding an unspecified case, sent a memo to the judge of peace in Grand-Gossier to verify whether a certain Charles Pierre "*c'est un VSN*."<sup>91</sup> *Makouts* utilized their privilege to illegally squat on the land owned by elites. On 3 December 1969, a tax agent complained to his superiors that land belonging to the elite Jean Dupuy was "Completely occupied by *miliciens*."<sup>92</sup> Some *makouts* used privileges to obtain trade licenses without facing bureaucratic red tape. In the remote northern rural town of Grison-Garde, Paulcius Demosthene and Lysiais Alce faced unspecified problems processing their application to obtain an artisan trade patent. On 24 July 1970, Emile Auguste, militia commander of the northern department and prefect of Cap-Haitien, came to their defense in a letter to the tax officer. "They are *Miliciens*, the supervisors of *la Révolution Duvalieriste*," Auguste asserted. "I would appreciate if you listen and do what is possible for them."<sup>93</sup> Some *makouts* demanded tax

---

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Pè Camille in the rural section Ravine du Roche, Limbé, 9 June 2016.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Adonat Touchard in Torbeck 2014.

<sup>91</sup> Commissaire Eften Célestin to Judge of Peace in Grand-Gossier, 22 August 1969, TB, Thiotte.

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Nicolas, Préposé to Collecteur des Contributions du Cap-Haitien, 3 December 1969 in folder Lettre de Renonciation, DGI-Impôts Locale, Acul-du-Nord.

<sup>93</sup> "*Mon bien cher Collecteur, Je vous envoie Paulius DEMOSTHENE et Lysias ALCE, de Grison-Garde qui ont un problème de patente à régler. Ce sont des Miliciens, les gérants de la Révolution Duvalieriste. Je vous saurais gré*

exemption that militated against state profit. On 2 October, a local tax collector in Grison-Garde complained to his superiors regarding tax evasion by the *makout* commander and wealthy rural denizen Dorléan Sagesse. He refused to pay state fees for holding a rural party featuring the popular musical orchestra *Tropicana*. Sagesse's felt that his status as a volunteer for national defense deserved certain perks that included tax exemption. "I am *Chef Milice*, I don't get a wage, no person can make me pay for this *spectacle*," sneered Sagesse.<sup>94</sup> He was expressing, in the most lucid of terms, the social contract between *makouts* and Duvalier that was the source of the regime's longevity: voluntary national defense in exchange for power.

---

*de les entendre et de faire pour eux ce qui ont possible.*" From Prefect Emile Auguste to Collecteur Maurice Monereau, 24 August 1970, Lettre de Renonciation, DGI/Impôts Locale, Acul-du-Nord.

<sup>94</sup> From Préposé G. Salomon to Collecteur des contributions de Cap-Haitien, 2 October 1970, folder Lettre de Renonciation, DGI/Impôts Locale, Acul-du-Nord.

## Chapter Four

### The Revitalized Haitian Military and Its Violent Conflict with the *Makout* Militia During the Rule of Jean-Claude Duvalier

François Duvalier died from natural causes in 1971, which, by then, everyone in Haiti knew who would inherit the presidency: his nineteen-year old son, Jean-Claude Duvalier. Now a dynastic regime, the next issue at hand was assuring militia support for the new and terribly young dictator. His father created the VSN/*tonton makout* militia to defend the regime from political attacks, to suppress political opposition, and to curb the influence of the U.S.-backed national army that was accustomed to overthrowing Haitian governments. Thus, under François Duvalier, the *makouts* were instrumental in buttressing the position of the regime. Now with Duvalier dead, the young Jean-Claude needed reassurance that *makouts* would remain loyal. Only some months in power, Jean-Claude chose the summer of July 1972 to hold his very first VSN militia parade where he would publicly explain what was expected of *makouts*.

In a speech during the parade, Jean-Claude urged *makouts* to stand firmly by his side: "I repeat anew that this Corps only has a single soul: Duvalier! only knows one *Chef*: Duvalier! only fights for a single destiny: Duvalier in Power!" Thus, unsurprisingly, the Duvalier regime expected what it had always expected; it yearned *makouts'* complete devotion to keeping the Duvalier government in power. And Jean-Claude – or at least the cabinet members who likely instructed the adolescent leader – understood that militia loyalty came with terms involving

recognizing the political ambitions of its *makouts*, many of whom were previously ostracized peasants. In his speech, Jean-Claude implicitly acknowledged this arrangement (loyalty for power) by reminding *makouts* that if his father had not organized the militia, they would still be marginalized in countryside. He told them: "You are defenders of a just Cause that goes beyond the cause of Man. It is a Cause of Class – the Haitian Masses of the Backcountry – that François Duvalier took out of isolation and lethargy to project onto the scene of National History..."<sup>1</sup> Long held by *makouts* that their loyalty to the regime was a bargaining chip to access power, Jean-Claude himself was implying the same to inherit the sort of support that they gave his father. However, Jean-Claude proved significantly inconsistent in his loyalty to *makouts* that brewed uncontrollable conflict that contributed to the unraveling of the regime.

Instead of showing steady support to *makouts*, Jean-Claude wavered between checking independent militia actions and revitalizing the Haitian army. This approach did not appear supportive of *makouts*, but rather reveals a readjustment within the state's separate branches of national security and a departure from its former practices. After his father spent time in power pursuing a different approach that instrumentally employed the militia to curb the army, Jean-Claude changed course and brought the military back to its previous position of prominence as the leading force of national security. For example, large sums of money were reinvested into the buildup of the army. Jean-Claude even reopened the military academy, which his father closed down, to train cadets. And while propping up the army in a determined fashion, Jean-Claude's government was less invested in strengthening the *makout* militia.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Vous êtes les défenseurs d'une Cause juste qui est loin d'être la cause Homme ou d'un clan. C'est la Cause d'une Classe – les Masses Haïtiennes du Pays et l'Arrière Pays – que François Duvalier tira de l'isolement et de la léthargie pour la projeter sur la scène de l'Histoire Nationale dont il changea le cours." MESSAGE DU PRESIDENT A VIE DE LA REPUBLIQUE AUX VOLONTAIRES DE LA SÉCURITÉ NATIONALE A L'OCCASION DU 29 JUILLET 1972, Haiti Fights against Impunity, <http://www.haitiluttecontre-impunite.org/texts/148>.

Even though proven over the years to be the most loyal branch of national security that defended the regime from attacks, *makouts* also presented significant problems that undermined the regime's authority. In the first place, *makouts* developed a reputation – in both local and global spheres – as terrifying and murderous bullies. The militia's infamous reputation doubly had the effect of stirring local popular agitation and disrupting diplomatic ties with foreign nations and institutions that advocated for human rights. Furthermore, the militia's independent use of force often militated against the regime's different levels of interests. *Makouts*, in efforts to defend individual and communal interests, obstructed tax collection and opposed the authority of other state agents. In sum, the behavior of *makouts* made governing unwieldy; they got in the way of government control over the population, foreign diplomacy, and the extraction of internal revenues. For the regime, the *makouts* grew into a nuisance that needed to be dealt with. Instead of trying to professionalize the militia as a form of discipline, the regime moved against the *makouts*.

Appropriating local and international characterizations of the *makouts* as violent petty tyrants, the regime often admonished and even legislated against certain abuses related to *makout* activities. The regime conveniently focused its rebuke on *makout* terror that targeted civilians. But the regime rarely denounced *makout* terror that was related to state repression of the political opposition or even anti-state violence employed by *makouts* to protect their communities from state police abuse and tax predation. Ignoring the complexities of *makout* terror allowed the regime to scapegoat its own inadequacies in improving the underdeveloped conditions and political inequalities of the countryside. In reality, the regime's denunciation of *makout* terror against civilians hid its practical motives that were related to foreign policy.



After suspending crucial assistance to Haiti for several years, the U.S. began to negotiate the full resumption of aid on the condition that official measures were taken by the Duvalier regime to limit the influence of the *tonton makouts*. The U.S. government would also provide military aid to the Jean-Claude's government to revitalize the national army whose influence had been reduced over the years under the rule of François Duvalier. The former dictator did not trust the army because of its ties to elements of the political opposition and U.S. government. Duvalier created the militia in part to check the influence of the army. However, Jean-Claude did the opposite and curbed *makout* influence to receive financial assistance and military aid from the United States. For these reasons, the U.S.-backed Haitian army experienced a resurgence in prominence under the rule of Jean-Claude. This proved to be bad policy that led to the undoing of the Duvalier regime. Attempting to reconfigure its security forces that privileged the army over the *makouts* would result in violent conflict between the security forces as they tussled to monopolize force.

Perhaps even more important to the exacerbation of intra-security tensions was the reinvigorated military's increased repression in peasant communities that were under *makout* protection. *Makouts* often utilized force to protect relatives and friends from arbitrary arrests by soldiers and military rural police *chefs* that escalated violence between the security forces. Violent conflict between *makouts* and the military started to spiral out of control in the 1980s and contributed to the waves of social strife that eventually uprooted the regime from power.

### **Demoralizing the *Makouts* and Revitalizing the National Military**

To be sure, the regime's policies directed at checking the activities of the *makout* militia started under François Duvalier. His approach to scaling back the influence of the *makouts* involved the return of U.S. aid to Haiti. However, the regime did not privilege the military over

the *makouts*. Rather, Duvalier prevented the growth of the army while legislating against the *makouts*. His government presented its anti-*makout* action as a response to popular complaints regarding militia abuse. As early as the mid sixties when U.S. aid started trickle into Haiti, Duvalier took bold moves against the *makouts* and presented his actions as an attempt to discipline *makout* abuses toward the population. Some of these approaches included purging top militia leaders and passing anti-*makout* laws that U.S. officials were keen to document.

U.S. officials sent approving reports to Washington that the Duvalier regime legislated against *makout* abuses and interpreted these measures as curbing the militia's privileges. On 26 May 1967, U.S. officials reported that Haitian the Ministry of Interior decreed the registration of all arms by prefects and civilians whom U.S. officials suspected included the *makouts* that were technically civilians.<sup>2</sup> Some days later, U.S. officials observed, the regime decreed that *makouts* could not serve as "notaries, public ministers, or surveyors, etc."<sup>3</sup> Around the same time, the Duvalier regime also discharged some of the most powerful regional *makout* commanders.

On 21 May 1967, U.S. officials reported that, after the militia committed intolerable violence against the population in Cap-Haitien when trying to quell an armed invasion, Duvalier sacked the town's VSN top commander, Pierrot "Pèlota" Giordani and allowed the local inhabitants to beat and drive local *makouts* "out of town."<sup>4</sup> On 5 March 1969, U.S. officials reported that Duvalier relieved the VSN chief of Grand' Anse, Sannette Balmir, after an investigation revealed her leading role in dispossessing peasants and committing other "revolting

---

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince to Department of State, June 24, 1967, POL 2-1, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo to State Department, May 5, 1968, POL 2-1, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>4</sup> American Embassy in Haiti to State Department, May 21, 1967, NARA, POL 2-1 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

injustices.”<sup>5</sup> For U.S. officials, anti-*makout* measures showed the determination of the regime to rebuke the militia that not only received international notoriety for terror, but also thwarted the U.S. from exercising influence in Haiti through the U.S.-backed army. For Haitians, the regime’s anti-*makout* policies encouraged the population to take action against local abusive *makouts*. This grew more to be the case the moment Duvalier died.

Only several weeks after his death, segments of the northern rural population took action against certain *makouts*. On 24 May 1971, the plaintiff Denise Lacarte took the *makout* Saintilus Louis to court and accused him and his fellow “*miliciens*” in her locality for having “the habit of causing pain.” Referring to *makout* terror, Denise’s statements in court were likely emboldened by state-sanctioned denunciations of militia abuse. Standing as a defendant in court, the accused *makout* Louis admitted that his disagreement with Denise was the result of her anti-*makout* remarks. “Denise Lacarte...declared in my presence that presently, the militia is not powerful at this moment,” testified Louis.<sup>6</sup> But the *makout* Louis must have known that the courageous Denise was part of a growing consensus that was prompted by the regime’s anti-*makout* policies. Dondon peasants, living only a couple hours away from Quartier Morin, shared the same anti-*makout* sentiment. In the same month, Dondon’s rural police stumbled upon a large crowd of people that fatally injured a local *makout* “Letéon Exantus V.S.N” and “made flee all the circulating *miliciens*.”<sup>7</sup> Anti-*makout* mob activities were not widespread, but it occurred enough to demonstrate that some northern rural denizens targeted *makouts* for retribution in response to the regime’s public denunciations. Jean-Claude would continue his father’s anti-*makout* policies.

---

<sup>5</sup> American Embassy in Haiti to State Department, May 21, 1967, NARA, POL 2-1 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>6</sup> “... quant à présent la Milice ne pas de pouvoir en ce moment.” A transcript detached legal transcript dated on 25 May 1971 in TP Quartier Morin.

<sup>7</sup> 1971 *Simple Police*, 18 May 1971, TP, Dondon.

Rooted in earlier attempts to curb the independent *makouts*, Jean-Claude purged influential militia leaders and legislated against their activities. For example, Jean-Claude discharged important *makout* leaders from the militia, even though his father chose them for their loyalty. In the 1960s, François Duvalier appointed Max "Rosalie" Adolphe as a leading militia commander and was his close confidant. However, after Jean-Claude came to power, Adolphe was removed from her post that notably demoralized *makouts* (she returned to the militia by the 1980s).<sup>8</sup> Years later, Jean-Claude relieved militia commanders Robert Cox and Zacharie Delva who were both initially appointed by and had close relationships with François Duvalier.<sup>9</sup> Jean-Claude also decreed against *makout* abuse. For example, the U.S. took notice of the regime's 1973 decree that denounced "arrests for personal reasons" and "invited the press to publicize any incidents of such abuses coming to its attention."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Jean-Claude's actions against the *makouts* resembled policies that originated from his father's rule in the 1960s. However, Jean-Claude diverged from his father's policies in one important way: the revitalization of the U.S.-created national military.

The United States created the Haitian army during the invasion period to suppress peasant insurgents and popular traditions of revolt. In the post-occupation period, the U.S. maintained ties with the Haitian army that was often behind military coups and political intrigues that overthrew governments. When he became president, François Duvalier partly created the *makouts* to check the army's interventionist tendencies, in turn, limit the U.S.'s influence in

---

<sup>8</sup> Rony Gilot, *Au gré de la mémoire: Jean-Duvalier ou l'ingénuité captive* (Delmas: Le Béréen, 2010), 114.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Claude Duvalier to Prefects and Commandants des Départements, 4 February 1980; Jean-Claude Duvalier to Lieutenant-Colonel Gracia Jean, Box 1, folder Department HQ (Artibonite), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>10</sup> Aembassy Port-au-Prince to Department of State, 20 December 1972, POL 2-3 HAI, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

Haitian national politics. Under Jean-Claude, however, the regime agreed to curb the militia and revitalize the military in exchange for U.S. assistance.

Diminishing the influence of *makouts* and rebuilding the army were part of regime's designs to receive aid from the U.S. government. After serving in Jean-Claude's government, Rony Gilot wrote a first-hand memoir of the president's rule. In his book, Gilot mentions that the U.S. government pressured the regime to dissolve the militia in exchange for financial aid and military assistance that strengthened the position of the army.<sup>11</sup> U.S. state department records can corroborate his remarks. Indeed, U.S. officials supported the idea of building up the Haitian military on the condition that the regime continued to minimize the militia's influence. After approving a \$200,000 grant and a \$500,000 credit to rebuild the Haitian military, the state department explained in a letter the first two objectives of the funding:

- (I) CONSOLIDATE USG INFLUENCE WITH HAITIAN ARMED FORCES, TRADITIONALLY A CRITICAL FACTOR IN HAITIAN POLITICAL STABILITY. REGULAR MILITARY IS GRADUALLY TAKING OVER INTERNAL SECURITY ROLE FORMERLY ASSIGNED TO MILITIA AND ASSOCIATED WITH IRREGULAR SECURITY UNITS CREATED BY THE LATE PRESIDENT FRANÇOIS DUVALIER.
- (II) RESPOND TO PRESIDENT JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER DESIRE TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF HAITIAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP, WHICH ALSO SERVES US OBJECTIVE OF FURTHER DIMINISHING THE ARBITRARY ROLE OF MILITIA AND OTHER IRREGULAR SECURITY FORCES.<sup>12</sup>

Jean-Claude accepted U.S. advances to strengthen the Haitian military and gestured towards curbing militia influence.

At first, Jean-Claude actually attempted to replace the *makouts*. In his memoir on Jean-Claude, Gilot tells us that the regime created a professionalized paramilitary force called the *Corps des Léopards* that operated under the control of the military. But the *Léopards*, according

---

<sup>11</sup> Gilot, *Au gré de la mémoire*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> From Aembassy Port-au-Prince to Washington DC, 4 February 1976, Central Decimal Files, RG 59, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

to Gilot, constituted a small tactical team of five hundred soldiers that proved ineffective in combatting rebel attacks. During a rebel invasion in the northern offshore island of La Torture, the *Léopards* reportedly fled at the sound of gunfire.<sup>13</sup> By trial and error, the regime learned that the militia was a more reliable security force because it represented a vast loyal corp. "No military garrison could replace this vast vague and impetuous popular fervor," observed Rony in regards to the *makouts*.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, *makouts* and peasant loyalists formed a "vast" and "vague popular fervor" that continuously proved to be an effective defensive force for the regime. And even though quite vast, they were often invisible to rebel groups plotting to overthrow the regime.

In 1981, peasants of Belladère reported to authorities that exiled rebels were organizing in their locality. Soon after, peasants and *makouts* fought the rebels. In the midst of the conflict, the peasant Andréus Olive confronted the rebels with only stones in his hands but was killed by a hail of rebel gunfire.<sup>15</sup> With the help of peasants, nevertheless, the authorities captured the rebels that included Vladimir Jeanty. Badly wounded and under military interrogation, Jeanty reportedly admitted his "proven surprise in finding that, far from siding with his movement, *paysans* would have rather *lynche* for the President."<sup>16</sup> A couple years later, another group of rebels were spotted in the frontier town of Thiotte. One military officer reported, "all the inhabitants of the zone participated in the search."<sup>17</sup> The *makout* base and its peasant loyalists

---

<sup>13</sup> Gilot, 114.

<sup>14</sup> "La milice était moins une force militaire qu'un monôme imposant dans la vitrine fasciste des Duvalier. Aucune garnison militaire ne pourrait se substituer à cette vague immense et impétueuse de ferveur populaire mue par un fanatisme aveugle et sans bornes." Gilot, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Colonel Jean B. Valme to CHEF SUPREME, 18 January 1981, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>16</sup> Colonel Valme to CHEF SUPREME, 22 January 1981, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>17</sup> Colin to COMDEP SUD-EST, 29 September 1983, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

formed an invisible wall that thwarted rebel attacks and provided consent for the regime.

Peasants and *makouts* even prepared folk songs that transmitted ideas about *makouts* defending the regime from exiled rebels or *kamoken*. One *makout* shared with the author a popular song in his village:

*Si yon nòm milisyen,  
Fòw pa pè lan mò woy  
Si yon nòm milisyen  
Fòw pa pè lan mò woy, fòw pa pè maladi woy,  
Divalye pare sèkèy la pou mwe,  
Jan Clod pare kleron an pou mwe,  
Na 'p manje kamoken yo.*

If a person is in the militia,  
You must not fear death, oh  
If a person is in the militia, oh  
You must not fear death ,oh,  
You must not fear sickness oh,  
Duvalier (the father) prepare a coffin for me,  
Jean-Claude prepare to sound the trumpet for me,  
We're going to eat the rebels...<sup>18</sup>

These defensive forms of peasant loyalty were fundamental to keeping the regime afloat.

Many peasants and *makouts* defended the regime in exchange for political power, which either meant a chance to become a local political boss; or meant the recognition of rights that were denied to them for half a century since U.S. intervention. Whatever their reasons, *makouts* formed a powerful support base that buttressed the position of the regime. Realizing the importance of the *makouts* over time, Jean-Claude could not outright dissolve the militia. But he continued to build up and strengthen the position of the military. This put *makouts* in a situation where they would have to share the use of force with army soldiers. Such conditions brewed violent tensions between the militia and the military.

---

<sup>18</sup> Interview with André Georges in Limbé, June 2015.

Internal security fighting was the result of emerging state policies in the Jean-Claude period that privileged the army over the *makouts*. Previously under François Duvalier, urban-based and formally educated soldiers were compelled to respect the status of the more numerous *makouts* that comprised a heterogeneous mixture of economic backgrounds, yet whose members usually hailed from humble rural backgrounds. Jean-Claude, however, reconfigured the status positions between the militia and the army that caused much internal security fighting. The eighties saw a remarkable increase in internal security conflict as the *makouts* and soldiers tussled for authority over the monopoly of force in their localities.

In 1983, the *makout* Prosper Jean and soldier Jean-Fritz Pierre got into a heated discussion that led to violent conflict. The *makout* Jean ransacked the home of Pierre's brother-in-law. In retaliation, the soldier Pierre dosed the *makout's* home with fuel and shot into the house to set it ablaze; one passerby was injured and a fourteen year-old named Fritznel Vincent was killed by the stray bullets.<sup>19</sup> In another incident in the southern region of Fondes des Negres, an argument broke out between the *makout* Ronel Chacha and an unnamed army soldier. During the "lively discussion," the *makout* Chacha "assaulted" the soldier and his brother, Louiza Jacques, who was also a soldier and part of the presidential guard, retaliated by using his Uzi to "attack" the *makout* Chacha.<sup>20</sup>

In 1984, a soldier shot the *makout* Anivin Louis in Jean-Denis of the commune of La Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite. Afterwards, the *tonton makouts* of Jean Denis began to gather in public, plotting to avenge the injured *makout* Louis. The prefect of the town had to plead with

---

<sup>19</sup> Capitaine Ruben Alexis to Chef d'Etat-Major Général, 21 September 1983; Désir to CHEMG, 23 September 1983, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>20</sup> Commandant District Medacier to Chef Supreme, 25 February 1985, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.



the local *makout* commander before calm was restored.<sup>21</sup> In 1985, the military *attachés* of the prefecture in Cayes were in conflict with local *makouts*. One telegram to the Jean-Claude warned: "EVOLUTION OF A TENSE SITUATION BETWEEN *MILICIENS* AND *ATTACHES* OF THE PREFECTURE OF CAYES, CREATED BY THE BLUNDERS [*MALADRESSES*] OF CERTAIN ATTACHES OF THE PREFECTURE."<sup>22</sup> Bloody clashes between soldiers and *makouts* were the product of the state policies favoring the former over the latter. Nevertheless, these conflicts had a socioeconomic dimensions to them.

For example, the military commander Henry Germain of Aquin warned his superiors that militia activities in Aquin were tied to the socioeconomic desperation of peasants. "There exists under my commandment an explosive situation susceptible of degenerating at any moment. The problem is posed by the lack of food crops, soil erosion in the mountains and the enormous difficulties cultivating the land," wrote the commander. For Germain, many Aquin peasants joined the *makouts* to escape rural poverty: "The peasant is lost not knowing to which saint to turn to be delivered [and] quickly sell their scarce resources to pay the local militia leader a large sum for a VSN card hoping to benefit greatly." In theory, enlistment into the *makouts* was supposed to be free on a voluntary basis, but Germain was suggesting that peasants needed to pay a fee to local militia leaders to obtain a VSN militia identification card as proof of their enlistment. However, "the poor peasants were quick to become disillusioned because of the misery that is rife in these areas. So they meet in assorted bands [with] sticks weapons, stones etc., and install a terror allowing some of them to impose their will upon the community. They

---

<sup>21</sup> Prefect Thomas Andréville to FAD'H Isidor Jean Erick, October 5, 1984, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>22</sup> Commander of the South Jean to Chef Supreme, 16 June 1985, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

steal, loot and kill like highway bandits operating in disordered bands."<sup>23</sup> Germain's warnings proved themselves to be partly true insofar as *makouts* activities would lead to violent tensions with the military.

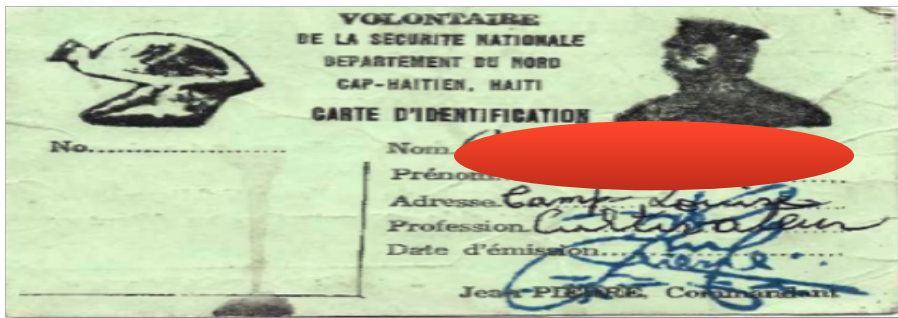
Though conscientious enough to recognize the socioeconomic dimensions causing internal security conflict, Germain relied on traditional views (rural poverty breeds banditry) to explain *makout* terror and to justify his later actions to stamp it out. After an "innumerable group of *Miliciens*... *surrounded and disarmed the soldiers*" stationed in Aquin, Germain retaliated against local *makouts*.<sup>24</sup> "HAVING THE HONOR TO INFORM YOUR EXCELLENCE ON THE INSTIGATION [OF THE] DISTRICT COMMANDER A GROUP OF SOLDIERS [IN] CAYES REINFORCED THOSE IN AQUIN ARMED WITH UZIS FIRED...PARTICULARLY AT THE VSN HEADQUARTERS. SOLICITING YOUR ENERGETIC INTERVENTION. CASES OF DEATH AND INJURIES REGISTERED," an official telegrammed Jean-Claude.<sup>25</sup> Even though Germain presented tensions with *makouts* as a socioeconomic problem, a perusal through volumes of military records reveals moral dimensions that involved peasant-*makout* solidarity against a military-police state structure.

---

<sup>23</sup> "Le paysan lâche à lui-même ne sachant à quel saint se livrer s'empresse de vendre ses maigres ressources pour payer chèrement une carte VSN du chef milice avec l'espoir d'en tirer largement profit." "le pauvres paysans, ont vite fait de déchanter compte tenu de la misère qui sévit dans ces zones. Aussi se réunissent-ils en bandes hétéroclites, armes de bâtons, de pierres etc., et installent une certain terreur leur permettant d'imposer leur volonté la communauté. Ils volent, pillent et tuent à l'instar des bandits des grands chemins opérant en bandes désordonnées." Henry Germain to Commandant du Département Militaire Sud, 30 November 1982, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Germain to COMDep-Sud, 28 November 1982, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>25</sup> Nold Rosor to Excellence Mr. Jean Claude Duvalier, 1 December 1982, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.



**Figure 4. Militia Identification Card.** The VSN ID card was issued to *makouts* in the Jean-Claude period, perhaps in an attempt to make the militia more legible to the state. This card was issued to a "*cultivateur*" or peasant.<sup>26</sup>

*Makouts* utilized their status to protect peasants from police and military repression. To be sure, both *makouts* and soldiers terrorized and bullied the civilian population. But *makouts* were distinctly part of a larger extensive network that penetrated rural communities and offered protection to relatives and friends from abuse. Soldiers, on the other hand, resided in urban spaces and typically assigned to a post foreign to them. Thus, because soldiers were outsiders and *makouts* were insiders, the former's aggression toward the local population was not tolerated by the latter. In addition, the military structure was designed by the U.S. in the occupation period to subdue peasant communities and remained ever since a very repressive organization in the Haitian countryside. When Duvalier created the militia, however, peasants join the *makouts* to not only check the army for the purpose of protecting the regime from coups and military intrigues, but also to protect themselves, relatives, and friends from the military and its rural police.

In 1980, for example, after being accused of striking the wife of a local police *chef de section*, a Kenscoff peasant was arrested. The peasant's uncle was a *makout* and demanded the release of his nephew from prison, but the *chef* arrested the *makout* as well. Incensed that one of

<sup>26</sup> One former *makout* lent me his VSN card so that I could make a copy of it.

their own was arrested, *makouts* in Kenscoff rose up against the military. "This discontent was manifested by a deployment of VSN on the periphery of the military barracks in Kenscoff, who wanted at all costs the agent of the rural police handed over [to them], and soon after many *milice* descended into the city...They wanted, they said, to go [complain] to the President." went one military report. In order to calm the situation, the military released the peasant and his *makout* uncle from custody and had the police *chef* "put in prison for indiscipline."<sup>27</sup>

*Makouts* attempting to prevent arrest of people that they knew intimately was likely an act to save their lives. Peasants arrested sometimes would end up dead in prisons. All across the Central Plateau near the Dominican-Haitian border, for example, military prison guards were reporting the mysterious deaths of incarcerated peasants. After being arrested for stealing two mules, on 6 February 1980, the Dominican-born and forty year old Martino "Toyoye" Bicinto, living in the rural section Renthe-Mathé, died of a heart attack while spending two days in a Belladère prison.<sup>28</sup> During the night of November 23, in the rural section de Hoye of Savonette a rural police agent ("*maréchal*") arrested and jailed Mévilma Cébastien for allegedly stealing goats. Cébastien was sent to a prison in Source Rouge and on the next day had reportedly suffered from cardiac arrest, dying in custody at the age of forty-five.<sup>29</sup> In 27 December 1982, the rural police of Lospalis in the region Hinche arrested Joseph Pierre for supposedly smuggling sugar from the Dominican Republic. Three days later, Pierre reportedly died in custody after falling into a coma and dying from a heart attack without explanation.<sup>30</sup> In other words, military authorities were accustomed to executing prisoners and covering up the cause of death. Aware

---

<sup>27</sup> Webert Jodesty to Commandant du District, 8 November 1980, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>28</sup> Commandant S. Dimanche to CHEMG, 7 February 1980, folder 12023, FAd'H, ANH, PauP.

<sup>29</sup> Commandant du Sous-District Richmond JH. Raphael to Commandant du District Belladère, 27 November 1980, folder 12023, FAd'H, ANH, PauP.

<sup>30</sup> Commandant du Sous-District Gérard J. Georges to Commandant du District de Hinche, 12 January 1983, folder 12023, FAd'H, ANH, PauP.

of such violent prison practices, *makouts* utilized forceful means to prevent the arrests of their rural kin and friends. *Makouts* and other rural denizens knew quite well that imprisonment was sometimes a sure death sentence, no matter how insignificant the charge.

In 1982, Marie-Jean Laguerre of Cavaillon was arrested and taken into custody for insulting and threatening an army-police sergeant. Herman Laguerre, her brother, was a *makout* and utilized violence to strike back. On 28 February, the *makout* Herman and twenty of his associates took aim and fired two shots at the military barracks in Cavaillon where his sister was jailed. The *makouts* took flight afterwards but showed that familial ties trumped inter-security loyalties.<sup>31</sup> On 21 June 1982, in the southern coastal town of Arniquais, several rural inhabitants and *makouts* gathered in front of the military post “to trouble the public peace” in protest against the arrest of Lafontant Saintus after he made obscene remarks and threatened the rural police. The crowd of *makouts* was dispersed after a soldier let off several shots into the air outside the district post.<sup>32</sup> On 6 November 1984, in the rural commune Montrouis in St. Marc, soldier Jean Ronald Plaisimond shot into the air to scatter a group of *makouts* who attempted to prevent the arrest of Micheline Dort.<sup>33</sup> In Hinche, the *makout* Gabriel Olive “energetically and publicly opposed... the arrest of three guilty persons” who participated in a food riot where the population attacked the local storage center.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the constant tensions between *makouts* and the army were not merely the product of the regime's efforts to revitalize the military as the supreme national force, but also reflects *makout* attempts to uphold their position as *chefs* in their localities which included being protectors of the community. Nevertheless, practices of *makout*

---

<sup>31</sup> Comm. Savage to CHEMG, February 31, 1982, Box 2, folder FAd’H Miscellaneous, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>32</sup> COMDEP SUD. S/Desire to CHEMG, June 21, 1982, Box 2, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>33</sup> Commandant du Département Militaire de l’Artibonite Clerine to CHEMG, 7 November 1984, Box 2, folder Department HQ (Artibonite), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>34</sup> VSN Commandant Luc Audate to Jean-Claude Duvalier, 1 June 1984, Box 4, folder FAd’H June-August 1984, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

protection also succumbed to internal communal conflicts where *makout* violence turned against the local population.

Military reports provide a rare archive that shows how *makout* terror was often wildly out of control resulting in fellow rural denizens falling victim. In 5 October 1981, in the rural locality of Haut Limbé, a soldier reported that six “VSNs...brought on the death of Magloire Louis.” Perhaps out of fear or out of protest, the parents of the victim “refused to receive the cadaver that lies on the ground.” On 29 June 1982, in the rural village of Felix located in Cavaillon, “the VSN Basillio François brought about the death of Damarco Joseph... with the aid of a dagger.” *Makout* terror ran so uncontrollably that some would turn their guns on each other. On July 1982, a military officer reported “around 6am, in the village ‘RAPPON’ 3rd rural section of Grand Boucan, Commune de Mirebalais, the VSN Joseph Lafortune shot with the aid of his Mauser #-2697 the VSN Octoma Jn-Baptiste of Mirebalais.” Others took their own life after carrying out terror on the population. In the outskirts of Jacmel, the *makout* Jean-Jacques Louis, after gunning down and killing the two sisters Gertha and Jesula Pascal, turned the gun on himself and fired into his sternum that caused his death.

On the surface, these military reports make *makout* terror appear random and senseless. Such reports served the larger agenda of Jean-Claude’s regime and the revitalized military to check independent activities of the *makouts*. A more focused perusal through volumes of military records, however, illuminates the underlying nature of *makout* terror and reveal how they were often targeted and rooted in social-based conflicts. For example, these conflicts were often related to land conflict. Even after the court ruled against his land claims and was dispossessed, the *makout* Louisius Toussaint stubbornly clung to his farm in a rural section of Arcahaie where he continued to plant rows of beans. However, the new official proprietor dispatched a group of

"*paysans*" to reap Toussaint's harvest. According to a military report, "Alerted [to the collection of his harvest], Louisius TOUSSAINT (V.S.N.) armed with his revolver Cal. 38 69560 and accompanied by his son Legoise, who also had a Cal. 22 number 2223093, confronted the said *paysans* with the aim of opposing them." Ordinary peasants, *makouts*, and a proprietor caught in the triangulation of competition over landed interests, terror soon followed: "he [Louisius] did not wait to fire at the group and.. St-Hubert Alcineus was shot in the chest and expired on the farm."<sup>35</sup>

Land conflict even torn fellow *makouts* apart. During a land dispute between two parties of peasants laying claim to an irrigated farm in the Artibonite, the *makout* Notaire Augustin sided with one group of claimants and, in August 1984, was killed by another *makout* belonging to the opposing party.<sup>36</sup> Terror was not merely carried out for terror sake, but often the product of social conflict from below. This reality, however, did not matter to the Jean-Claude regime. To address such complexities, in any case, would have unveiled the regime's inadequacies in mediating local conflict and its failures to sponsor policies that would ameliorate local tensions that derived from political inequalities. In particular, the regime's policies on revitalizing the military led to increase policing and arrests of civilians that only spurred social strife.

Indeed popular unrest in the 1980s were tied to increased military arrests – so much so that high-ranking military officers mentioned in their internal correspondences the problem of growing unrest related to incarceration. In 1984, the military commander Williams Regala, who would later be part of the military junta that assumed power after the fall of the regime, sent out the following memo to military commanders throughout the nation: "For some time, various

---

<sup>35</sup> Adjudant Pierre Antoine Alcy to Commandant Sous District, 2 September 1983, Box 1, folder Southern Military Districts, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>36</sup> Sgt. Bordenau to CHEMG, 22 August 1984, Box 2, folder Department HQ (Artibonite), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

organizational commanders report movements of crowds who take to the streets or who come just outside military posts shouting pretexts such as unjustified arrests...by the inappropriate intervention of agents of the public Forces."<sup>37</sup> The problem of jailing was the problem of freedom in Haiti ever since the U.S. occupation stamped out popular traditions of revolt that previously checked authoritarian tendencies. However, tradition of popular revolt would return to Haiti during the 1980s. In addition to seeking the protection of *makouts* to resist military and police abuses, peasants turned to collective forms of protests that confronted increased military repression and eventually dislodged the Duvalier regime. Collective forms of protest, paradoxically, stemmed from the regime's very designs to transform the *makout* base into a more benign rural grassroots organization called community council. As we shall see, these plans backfired as *makouts* and peasants learned forms of political mobilization in community councils where laid the seeds of democratic revolution.

---

<sup>37</sup> Asst. Chef d'Etat-Major Williams Regala's Memorandum to Chef de la Police de Port-au-Prince et à tous Les Commandants de Départements Militaires, 18 June 1984, Box 4, folder FAd'H Sept-Oct 1984, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.



## Chapter Five

### Building Roads to Democratic Revolution: Reviving Development to Curb *Tonton Makouts* and the Formation of Collective Protest (1966-1986)



**Figure 5. Roadwork by Community Councils.** This is an image of one of the first community councils created in Haiti whose members built a road that directly connected the isolated northwest region to the capital in Port-au-Prince.<sup>1</sup>

*Nan lakou a,  
Li plante mayi a,  
Mayi a bèl,  
Li tounen wozo,  
Wozo sa tounen ponya,  
Ponya ki la, se nou pou ponya de yo!*

In the family courtyard,  
A corn is planted,

---

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation Report, 1972 HACHO, Box 101, CARE RECORDS, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

The corn grows beautifully,  
It turns into an unbendable reef,  
This reef turns into a dagger,  
This dagger is here for us to strike them!

-Popular *Vodou* song in the Artibonite Valley

As the *makouts* and soldiers fought each other, peasant protests also exploded in the 1980s. Popular protests originated from the regime's policies intended to curb the *tonton makout* militia. This included regime efforts to transfer peasant support from the *makout* militia into peasant-based *conseil communautaires* or community councils that were involved in development projects or *devlopman*. This chapter argues that the regime urged *tonton makouts* to labor in *devlopman* as an implicit way to check *makout* independent activities, which often led to unsanctioned violent terror against peasants and agents of the state alike.

This chapter argues that *devlopman* was also a new social contract that the regime struck up with *makouts* and other peasant loyalists in order to reorient them away from independent forms of popular terror and towards more benign forms of political participation such as providing labor and mobilization for state-sponsored agricultural projects. Ordinary peasants and *makouts* joined community councils attempting to develop their communities and ease the hardship of *travay tè* or working the land. As members of community councils, peasants and *makouts* learned how to organize themselves and mobilize their communities toward goals related to improving their social conditions. Although initially done within the conservative politics of state-sponsored *devlopman*, the organizing efforts of peasants, over time, became subversive that contributed to the popular uprising which overthrew the Duvalier regime in 1986. Called the *dechoukaj*, this revolution was truly democratic and ushered in the presidency of the liberation theologian Jean Bertrand Aristide who abolished the military and rural police, which

finally ended the U.S.-created post-emancipation crisis in Haiti. Thus, although created to keep the regime in power, state-sponsored peasants groups including the *makout* militia and peasant councils reintroduced political organizing to the countryside and inadvertently revived popular traditions of revolt that led to democracy in Haiti.

### **Community Councils, Roads, and the Formation of Collective Action**

Aside from building up the military, the regime tried to create armless peasant groups that would absorb the "vaguely vast and impetuous popular fervor" that constituted the *makout* base. This approach aimed to demilitarize the countryside while containing peasant support for the regime. However, the demilitarizing aspect of this approach always failed. François Duvalier was the first to experiment with this strategy. In 1967, Duvalier published a decree in *Le Nouvelliste* that announced a new armless civil militia called the "Territorial Brigade" whose purpose was to "insure the peace, and security of families."<sup>2</sup> U.S. officials followed these events but remained wary of its applicability.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the realization of the armless militia never took place and efforts to demilitarize *makouts* and peasants failed.

The regime would later move to experiment with grassroots peasant groups to reduce *makout* influence. Grassroots organizations had precedent in the early Duvalier era. Starting in 1958, before the proliferation of *makouts*, the Duvalier regime installed grassroots peasant organizations in the Artibonite valley that provided labor for the construction for a major irrigation system in the area. In 1962, however, the U.S. cancelled aid to the Artibonite

---

<sup>2</sup> On decree, see 9 June 1967, *Le Nouvelliste*. Duvalier regime began legislating against abuses that the U.S. embassy interpreted as curbing the privileges of the tonton makouts. The Ministry of Interior decreed on 26 May 1967 that ordered the registration of all arms by prefects and civilians whom U.S. officials suspected included the tonton makouts who were technically civilians. U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince to Department of State, June 24, 1967, NARA (College Park, Maryland). RG 59, POL 2-1 HAI. notaries, public ministers, or surveyors, etc." American Embassy In Haiti to State Department POL 23-8.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince to Department of State, June 24, 1967, NARA (College Park, Maryland). RG 59, POL 2-1 HAI.

irrigation project that led to the disappearance of these peasant organizations. After years of absence, U.S. development agencies revived the concept of community grassroots organizing in the Haitian countryside.

In particular, a U.S.-based donor relief agency called Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) reintroduced the concept of using grassroots peasant organizations for community development. CARE's activities in Haiti were in violation of the U.S. ban on aid to Haiti, but the U.S. secretly approved and even released funding to support the project.<sup>4</sup> With U.S. aid and private donor funds, CARE started a development program titled Haitian-American Community Help Organization (HACHO) that offered medical and nutritional relief to the impoverished northwestern peninsula.

More importantly, HACHO was the first to create peasant-based grassroots organizations called community councils through which peasants would learn about ideas of "self help." HACHO officials promoted "self-help" to rural communities that taught peasants to rely on their collective efforts for development, which probably contained the neoliberal aspiration of disassociating social service with the national state. But peasants already knew a life of self-help; they spent a century and a half hardly receiving state relief of any sort towards agricultural development, grooming them to depend on each other for survival. HACHO, in reality, provided peasant councils with materials and resources from foreign sources that seem to only teach "self-help" communities to become dependent on foreign relief. Nevertheless, HACHO officials

---

<sup>4</sup>US Aid resumed in Haiti by financially supporting HACHO but secretly at first. Duvalier attempted to publicize US assistance to Haiti for political capital, but the US publicly denied their involvement. CARE records reveal that the State Department wanted to keep it that way. On 27 September 1966, CARE's executive director wrote to other CARE officials, "The Department desires that we make no intimation of the connection between AID and HACHO...Whether the Department would deny it upon direct inquiry isn't clear. Certainly we could not do so. But in the circumstances it would seem wisest for us to keep our public traps shut on the subject so as not to invite a direct inquiry." "Duvalier Seeks Better Image in 'Lifetime' Job," 19 September 1966, *The Washington Daily News*. Lambie, 27 September 1966, CARE RECORDS, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

followed self-help ideology strictly. One agent wrote: "I'm sure no one wishes to super-impose a program on HACHO. We should all agree that it should fit the basic needs as closely as possible. But, it would not hurt to place strict limits on [the] kind of effort and then let local ingenuity and imagination do the best job possible within those financial and categorical limits."<sup>5</sup>

Local "ingenuity" was supposed to emanate from the community councils in the northwest rather than the state. "Community Councils decide on projects," one U.S. official remarked in 1968, "and make their wishes known to HACHO community development specialists, and experts assigned from the Haitian Department of Agriculture, who aids their deliberations." Peasant members in community councils often communicated to HACHO personnel their desire to build infrastructure that would improve their conditions. This included requesting materials to construct schools, potable water pumps, wells, latrines, and roads.<sup>6</sup> Self-help combined with giving the bare minimum was the ideology of the day for development agencies and infused other community councils in Haiti. The small level activities reflected the dire circumstances of the peasantry and the small-mindedness of foreign donors. Roads in particular preoccupied the energies of all parties involved in rural development.

HACHO, CARE, and peasant councils focused on the construction and upkeep of roads in the northwest. Each had a stake in it. For the regime, roads signified the reach of the state. For HACHO, better roads meant easier travels for the mobile health program and officials. Peasants found roads quite important as well. Roads had a special place in the peasant *mentalité* and their views of progress. Dr. Carlo Boulos, the technical director of HACHO and close confidant of

---

<sup>5</sup> From Joseph Steele to James Lambie, 25 April 1967, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

<sup>6</sup> Community councils in Jean Rabel, for example, largely focused on building access to clean water, healthy hygiene, flood control, soil preservation, and reforestation; in nine months, community councils built 676 public and private latrines, 291 roadside benches, 222 home improvement in kitchens and homes, planted 19,251 tree seedlings, cleaned 9 springs, and capped 1 water source. See, Evaluation Report in folder J-Rabel Activities during the Last 9 Months, 1971, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

Duvalier, understood this very well and remarked, "For we must not loose sight that the Haitian Rural People are very mobile and the feet of the peasant and his donkey are his more sure vehicle."<sup>7</sup> Records ranging as far back as the nineteenth century demonstrate peasant obsession over the construction of roads that connected rural districts with urban towns. Roads facilitated the transmission of agricultural crops from the countryside to the city and urban merchandise moving the other way round. Put simply, roads improved peasant commerce.

HACHO's peasant councils undertook road construction and repairs to connect their marginalized world to markets in urban centers. Previously, good roads or roads at all were absent in the northwest. For example, one HACHO agent reported that Jean Rabel peasants, prior to the installation of peasant councils, historically marketed corn, beans, peanuts, bananas, legumes, coffee, tobacco, and castor oil beans to Nassau, which was located in the neighboring island-nation of Bahamas that required peasants to cross the high seas rather than taking bad roads to nearby towns in Haiti. Road improvement was good for the peasant economy. Community councils in the rural section of La Croix St. Joseph built roads on which "farmers are sending produce to Port-de-Paix by truck in a matter of minutes, rather than the long, slow uneconomic trip on animal back that was previously necessary."<sup>8</sup> Between 1968 and 1969, peasant councils built or repaired about 175 miles of roads webbing the northwest communes together and linking them to roads that went through the Artibonite department and all the way down south to the capital of Port-au-Prince.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Carlo Boulos to the Directors of CARE, New York, 28 April 1967, folder 5, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

<sup>8</sup> "Report on HACHO Activities, October and November 1968 and Recommendations or Program Expansion," 30 November 1968, in folder HACHO Administrator, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Not paved roads, but graveled roads which enough rainfall rendered muddied – trapping the tires of medical trucks providing health services, the hoofs of mules saddled with agricultural merchandise, and the feet of desperate peasant women seeking to convert the yields of farming labor into some cash. Rain sometimes stopped everything moving on roads. HACHO reported in 1968, "rain has taken its toll on all the roads" in St. Michel de l'Attalaye. Gonaives was the town through which northwestern goods passed in order to reach the capital, but not when the roads melted apart. The report complained, "because of the conditions of the roads, the town [of Gonaives] has been virtually cut off from commercial traffic since the middle of September." The roads – and everyone who depended on it – were at the mercy of nature. "The work of years can be wiped out in a day, and frequently is."<sup>10</sup> Sometimes the lack of funding and materials compounded the already bad situation. "Gonaïves-Gros Morne road is terminated...due to lack of gravel which we had anticipated," went one monthly HACHO report in 1973.<sup>11</sup> Despite the constant struggle, roads remained the preoccupation of community councils and the expansion of roads meant the multiplication of community councils in the northwest.

As roads spread so did council membership. The most remote rural sections in the northwest claimed council membership. Each of the fourteen rural sections of Bombardopolis established councils with section Nan Soufrance boasting the largest membership of 177 peasants; eleven rural sections of Anse Rouge with Sources Chaudes boasting the highest of 82 members; eight rural sections of Cabaret with the section that went by the same name boasting the highest of 41 members; and the forty-seven rural sections of Jean Rabel with Bassin Bleu boasting the highest of 112 members. And these community councils by 1969 built 247

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "HACHO Administrator's Report July 1973-Sept 1973," in folder HACHO Contract 1972-3, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

kilometers of motorable roads and 116 kilometers of "penetration routes" in the impoverished southern half of the northwest peninsula. In total, early community councils in the northwest had a membership of 4,339.<sup>12</sup> Later, membership experienced a drastic upsurge. Jean Rabel, alone, had sixty-five community councils with a total membership of 7,680 peasant members.<sup>13</sup>

HACHO and CARE encouraged road labor through supplying community councils with food obtained from foreign donors, including the international Food for Work (FFW) program. Although a foreign program, the idea food for work resembled *kombit* traditions in the countryside. Since the nineteenth century, landed peasants invited other peasant neighbors to help them farm in exchange for food and collective festivities. The practice continued well into the Duvalier period. Thus, the FFW translated well into the moral economy of the countryside. Peasants joined community councils for various reasons but the most salient attraction was access to foreign food relief in exchange for their labor. The link between the spread of councils and food was direct.

As one U.S. official pointed out, "through food-for-work programs a growing infrastructure of community councils is being developed."<sup>14</sup> By 1972, FFW provided \$126,230 worth of foodstuff to construct hundreds of miles of roads throughout the northwest.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the expansion of roads was also precious to peasants because roads improved the circulation of their agricultural production. Nevertheless, foreign food dumping ensured active participation. For northwestern peasants, the incentive was a matter of starvation because the

---

<sup>12</sup> "Report on HACHO Activities October and November 1968 and Recommendations or Program Expansion," in folder HACHO Administrator, 30 November 1968, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

<sup>13</sup> "Evaluation Report, 1971," in folder J-Rabel Activities during the Last 9 Months, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

<sup>14</sup> Analysis of Regular and Emergency Food Programs, 22 March 1968, AID 15-9 HAI, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>15</sup> Milo Kamstra to Merto Cregger, 13 April 1972, in in folder Evaluation Report 1972, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.



southern half of the northwest peninsula was the most arid and impoverished zone in Haiti. Peasants joined community councils and labored hard to get imported sacks of food. "The road between Gonaives and Anse Rouge improved spectacularly thanks to CARE emergency food program," reported HACHO officials in 1973. When the road connecting Anse Rouge to the out-of-the-way commune of Antwel needed repair, "120,000 pounds of emergency food was approved for work on the road."<sup>16</sup> The experiment of HACHO was successful for meeting most of its already limited goals, but its long lasting legacy was the formation of peasant community councils and making the construction of roads the fundamental basis of development in Haiti by the late sixties. A few years after some of the first community councils were established in the northwest, the regime extended the practice throughout the country to reduce *makout* influence.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beginning in 1967, the regime appropriated HACHO's concept of community councils and established state-sponsored councils throughout Haiti. According to state statistics, each rural section possessed a council and Haiti had about 550 rural sections. As a scholar who studies community councils in Haiti, Glen R. Smucker tells us, "even the most conservative figures suggest that community councils have been organized throughout most of rural Haiti. From the standpoint of institutional development the sheer number of peasant councils constitutes a significant innovation without precedent in Haitian rural life."<sup>17</sup> The Duvalier regime expanded peasant councils to check *makout* independent activities. The timing provides a good clue.

Indeed, the juncture in which the regime expanded councils suggests that peasant councils were intended to reorient peasants away from *makout* and popular terror and towards

---

<sup>16</sup> "Evaluation Report, 1971," in folder J-Rabel Activities during the Last 9 Months, Box 101, CARE Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, SASB, NYPL.

<sup>17</sup> Glenn Smucker, "Peasant Councils and Politics," in *Politics, Projects, and People: Institutional Development in Haiti*, ed. Derrick W. Brinkerhoff and Jean-Claude Garcia-Zamor (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 100.

more benign forms of political participation such as roadwork. Take for example the fact councils expanded in Haiti while the global trend was moving in the opposite direction. When in vogue internationally, the concept of community development served the interests of foreign policymakers. They utilized community development to offer populations in the Third World an alternative to revolutionary doctrines.<sup>18</sup> However, starting in the early sixties, foreign policymakers turned away from ideas of community development. In 1963, for example, U.S. AID closed down its own Community Development Division. And yet, as the international community reduced efforts to promote community development groups throughout the Third World by the mid-1960s, community-based organizations were revived in Haiti. "The history of this movement in Haiti is a singular case," observed Smucker. As ideas of community development dwindled in the world, this defunct practice was brought back to life in Haiti to demilitarize the countryside.<sup>19</sup>

Seeking to redirect peasants away from *makout* terror, the Duvalier regime installed councils in every rural section in Haiti to provide labor for, among other development projects, road construction. Peasants in councils also yearned the construction of roads and organized

---

<sup>18</sup> Smucker, "Peasant Councils and Politics," 96-97.

<sup>19</sup> The regime even revived ideas of *justice sociale*. One prefect of Thiotte named Michel Craan, who could have also been a member of the militia, pursued pro-peasant policies in the name of carrying out *justice sociale*. Craan ordered the local court to settle legal disputes between peasants over land inheritance by equally subdividing land among the peasant plaintiffs on the basis that such a ruling was in virtue with "la Justice Sociale encouragée [préconisée] by the Chief Supreme for life of the Nation S.E. [His Excellence] Doctor François DUVALIER." Michel Craan, 21 July 1969, 1970 Simple Police, TP, Thiotte. Craan, generally, pursued pro-peasant policies. On 25 May 1968, Craan, for example, overruled a local court case dispossessing peasants Lauditer Faustin, Café Cadeau, and Méricène Magloire. "*Veillez pour notre Gouvernement nous informer la décision de justice qui a permis à notre tribunal de déguerpir les paysans Lauditer Faustin, Café Cadeau, Méricène Magloire sur leur habitation situées à Mare-Mirande commune de Grand Gosier, Veuillez demander en outre aux bénéficiaires de la décision extra Légale de votre tribunal de sursoir sur autres activités sur ces dites habitations.*" Michel Craan to Juge de Paix Thiotte, 31 May 1968, folded inside the 1970 Simple Police, TP in Thiotte. Duvalier himself, during the later period of his reign, began gesturing towards *justice sociale*. On 28 November 1970, the newspaper *Haiti-Journal* reported that three days ago, Duvalier gave away twenty-one acres of land in Torbeck to the descendants of the nineteenth-century peasant rebel leader Jean-Jacques Accau. The report claimed that Duvalier's effort meant to explain "*la politique de justice sociale du gouvernement du Président DUVALIER.*" Le Président Duvalier réintègre dans leurs biens les héritiers de Jean-Jacques Accau," 28 November 1970, *Haiti-Journal*.

their rural communities to meet and discuss how to bring roads into their communities. In the Duvalier years, peasants rarely gathered publicly in large numbers unless during state rallies. Thus, council meetings gave peasants the opportunity to discuss *devlopman* that included a gamut of small projects. Mèrigène Gé of Jean-Rabel remembers that the council "gave us advice, met with us every eight days, we dialogued about arranging ourselves (*aranjman*), how to *lache*, how to farm (*travay*), how to prepare the earth and stuff (*bagay*), do all what's possible."<sup>20</sup> Among the various issues discussed, building roads was often a priority for councils. Also from Jean Rabel, Divèsè Divino expressed pessimistically, "They used to do nothing on days we met (*fè reyinyon*). We got together to talk a lot. We didn't do anything. But it was these very same community councils that built roads. You see all these roads that go to Port-au-Prince, which go all around the country; it was the councils. This is really the only thing that councils did...This was how the backcountry (*andeyò*) became a city (*lavi*)."<sup>21</sup> For Divino and most peasants, roads accelerated the transportation of crops to markets, improved mobility, and allowed access to the urban centers where state and economic power were concentrated. Furthermore, as indicated in Divino's remarks, peasants saw roads as evidence of progress that placed the countryside and urban spaces on equal footing in terms of road construction.

What Divino describes as useless collective talking may have indeed led to the realization of unsustainable roads. Peasant-built roads were not sustainable and required continuous labor. But road construction still drove peasant conceptions and volition to move collectively towards a better future for the countryside. Continuous meetings compelled peasants to organize collectively for particular projects, especially for roads. "We made a lot of effort to open up this little whole," boasted the community council president Joseph Derosier of the southern region of

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Merijen Gé, rural section of Lacoma, Jean Rabel, October 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Divèsè Divino, rural section of Lacoma, Jean Rabel October 2013.

Mackary. Derosier pointed to the penetrating roads as some of the major accomplishments of his community council. Still the unpaved roads, Derosier admitted, kept easily falling into to disrepair and needed continuous work.<sup>22</sup> So roads needed to be constantly worked. Even so, mobilizing for road construction inadvertently revived peasant traditions of collective political protest that was previously suppressed during the occupation. Imagine, what would become widespread collective rural protests were partly resuscitated by the tedious work of road construction.

Indeed, road construction preoccupied peasant councils and they organized frequently for the matter. On 2 April 1969, the Haitian newspaper *Haiti-Journal* informed its readers, "the Community Council of Pignon has built 8 kilometers of road" that connected to the neighboring commune of Ranquitte.<sup>23</sup> When the community council of rural section Duval met on 7 February 1970, they talked of accessing credit, potable water, and, of course, "*le problème de la route avec ses tournants malaisés, presque dangereux, les multiples raidillons qui surplombent les basfond.*"<sup>24</sup> On 3 March 1971, a reunion of 200 members of the community councils around Fort-Jacques met with state specialist to learn about rational methods of animal husbandry, farming, and ways to prevent soil erosion, but the meeting extensively covered the problems of roads.<sup>25</sup> In Lamothe, peasant council leaders Edmond Parent, Bien-Aimé Israel, Mme. Andre Toussaint, Dautruche Narcisse, and Joseph Garcia complained to state agricultural officials that their communities lacked, "roads, drywalls, a school, and a dispensary."<sup>26</sup> On the same day peasants in Hatte Dufort in Léogane formed a community council on 15 December 1970, they

---

<sup>22</sup> Interview with, Joseph Derosier, third rural section in the commune Mackary, 25 February 2015.

<sup>23</sup> "NOUVELLES DU NORD," 2 April 1969, *Haiti Journal*.

<sup>24</sup> Victor Bastien, *En Haiti dans la vie rurale* (Port-au-Prince: Presses de l'Imprimerie), 155

<sup>25</sup> Bastien, *En Haiti*, 157-160

<sup>26</sup> Bastien, 181.

organized a meeting where they discussed building roads, potable water sources, rural schools, a literacy center, and even irrigation<sup>27</sup>; a year later, however, Dupuy councils neglected to mention irrigation in their list of needs.<sup>28</sup> Intended to distract them from independent actions of violence, peasants often engaged in minor projects that barely lasted without sustained economic support. In the process, they reconstructed traditions of collective action that would transform to protest. But why were the minor projects the goal of development projects? The answer is not yet clear.

Gone, nonetheless, were the plans of major agricultural projects of the late 1950s and early 1960s that were evinced by the construction of the large irrigation systems such as the Artibonite project. The shift from thinking big to thinking small likely reflects how foreign agencies turned away from New Deal inspired policies and towards more neoliberal approaches of servicing the international poor. By the 1980s, development progress in Haiti meant small projects that included having schools, dispensaries, and especially roads in villages without a sustainable national economy to replenish these projects. Community councils spent much of their energies and labor on these unsustainable projects, while the regime seemed to yearn for *developman* to disrupt the influence of the *makouts*. Distracted by labor, the regime hoped, peasants would be less inclined to engage in violent *makout* activities that were independent of the regime's agenda. However, the collective activities of councils would turn peasants and *makouts* into instruments of revolutionary change.

\*\*\*\*\*

Unable to outright disband the *makout* militia, the regime under Jean-Claude encouraged *makouts* to lend their labor to *developman* projects and assist community councils. By publicly

---

<sup>27</sup> "Le Mouvement Communautaire a La Hatte-Dufort," 15 December 1970, Haiti Journal.

<sup>28</sup> In 1971, the peasant elder Félix Auguste was recorded to have declared to 200 Dupuy peasants during a council meeting, "Si des routes, des écoles, des dispensaires, des ponceaux se construisent, si une lutte est menée contre les insectes ou les maladies des plantes, si l'on crée des puits, tout se fait avec l'homme et pour l'homme." Bastien, 185

urging the militia to assist councils, Jean-Claude was concealing the regime's hidden agenda to curb *makout* influence. During the 1972 militia parade, he announced that *makouts* should now orient themselves toward the regime's new "evangelism" that involved the state mobilizing peasant labor for "*développement*."<sup>29</sup> In the 1970s, one U.S. official quoted Jean-Claude and *makout* leaders to have mentioned the following during a press interview, "THE PRESIDENT AND OTHER VSN LEADERS SPOKE OF THE VSN'S NEW ROLE IN ASSISTING HAITI'S 'ECONOMIC REVOLUTION' ON ALL FRONTS: PROFESSIONAL AND HANDICRAFT ACTIVITIES, MANUAL LABOR, AND ASSISTANCE TO PEASANT FARMERS."<sup>30</sup>

Encouraging the militia to join *devlopman*, the regime endeavored to utilize labor as a way to curb *makout* influence. But by the late 1970s, the U.S. realized that *makouts* remained a force to be reckon with. During a militia parade in the capital, U.S. officials were astonished by a great show of *makout* force whose members exploded their arms around the city. This made the State Department doubt the regime's efforts to reorient the militia's new role as agents of rural development. One U.S. official remarked, "DESPITE PERIODIC EFFORTS TO ENTICE THEM INTO ROAD MAINTENANCE, REFORESTATION, OR DEVELOPMENT WORK -- EFFORTS WHICH THE GOH [Haitian Government] EVIDENTLY WANTS TO INTENSIFY - - THE VSN REGARD THEMSELVES AS THE PRIVILEGED GUARANTORS OF DOMESTIC PEACE AND THE CONTINUATION OF THE DUVALIERIST ORDER."<sup>31</sup>

Frustrated at what seem like a resurgence in *makout* morale, another U.S. official remarked, "I FEEL THAT PRESIDENT DUVALIER WAS CONVINCED THAT IT WAS NECESSARY

---

<sup>29</sup> "MESSAGE DU PRESIDENT A VIE DE LA REPUBLIQUE AUX VOLONTAIRES DE LA SÉCURITÉ NATIONALE A L'OCCASION DU 29 JUILLET 1972, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>30</sup> "VSN ANNIVERSARY GIVEN BIG PLAY: ROSALIE ADOLPHE NAMED VSN SUPERVISOR GENERAL," 2 August 1976, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>31</sup> "Outbursts of Shooting Incidents Mars VSN Celebrations," July 1979, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

TO GIVE THE VSN A BOOST AND TO LET IT BE KNOWN HE STILL APPRECIATED THEIR LOYALTY AND SUPPORT.” The U.S. report went on: “OBVIOUSLY, THE VSN IS ESSENTIALLY AN UNDISCIPLINED, ILL-TRAINED, PEASANT-BASED PARA-MILITIA WHICH HAS NO COMPREHENSION OR RESPECT FOR LAW AND ORDER. THEY ARE A DANGEROUS FORCE WHICH COULD TURN AGAINST THE PRESIDENT IF THEY FELT BEING SOLD [DOWN] THE RIVER.”<sup>32</sup> By the late seventies, Jean-Claude realized that his regime relied on the *makouts* as a popular base of loyal defenders against rebel attacks. Thus, instead of outright dissolving the militia, the regime developed an ambivalent discourse that praised *makout* loyalty to defend the regime but also urged them to assist peasant community councils as a way to curb their independent activities.

During a VSN militia parade on 29 July 1979, Jean-Claude gave a speech that conveyed the ambivalent message. On the one hand, Jean-Claude reminded *makouts* that he still counted on them to defend the position of the regime: "The Militia was created to be vigilant, to defend the Duvalierist Revolution, to obscure mean eyes awaiting disorder, who want to see the nation become anarchic." On the other hand, he announced: "It was created to help the population in all development activities... in all the rural sections for national development." As a way to curb *makout* influence, the regime contrived this dual role for the militia. "They are soldiers of development. Gun in one hand, tool in the other hand," asserted Jean Claude.<sup>33</sup> The regime made sure to constantly remind them of this. In the eighties, the regime dispatched a central *makout* figure to the town of Mirebalais with instructions "on the role of *la Milice*" in which

---

<sup>32</sup> "Meeting with Foreign Minister Dorcely on VSN Shootings," 1 August 1979, RG59, Central Decimal Files, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>33</sup> *BWA CHANDEL: Tronpet Janklodis*, July 1979, in my possession.

Jean-Claude “insists that the *Milicien* is and remains an agent of development in the good economic fight that carries out the continuity of the government.”<sup>34</sup>

Heeding the regime's call, many *makouts* joined and even led peasant councils that were organized for development projects. In Lacoma, the wealthy farmer Florantin Louisaint was simultaneously the commander of the local militia and the president of a local community council.<sup>35</sup> During an oral interview, the *makout* Pè Camille of Ravine du Roche spoke proudly about helping to establish, in 1976, the first community council in his locality of which he became its vice-president; the council's president, Willy Ajenor, was also a *makout*.<sup>36</sup> Other community councils and *makouts* fused together to create a single organization. “The VSN Community Council of Kenscoff” was formed and professed to be fulfilling the regime's objective of “a great *combite*.”<sup>37</sup> *Combite* was a peasant custom of providing labor to fellow peasants in exchange for food and gifts. The regime often distributed FFW foreign foods to peasant councils in exchange for labor. Kenscoff’s *makout* council and other seemed to be in line with the regime’s plan of integrating *makouts* into *devlopman* projects.

Indeed, many *makouts* and peasant councils were either one in the same, or worked hand-in-hand for *devlopman*, which usually involved road construction. In a letter to supervisors dated on 28 September 1981, for example, one state agent reported that peasant councils were carrying out a development project in the rural section of Camp Mary in the Artibonite. And “with the

---

<sup>34</sup> Préfect Lionel Bissainthe to Son Excellence Monsieur Jean-Claude Duvalier, 14 May, 1984, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Desilien “Tonde” in rural section of Lacoma, Jean-Rabel, 13 June 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Joining these multiple state-sponsored peasant organizations brought peasants into closer proximity to central power. Camille recalls with delight how his council petitioned Jean-Claude to come to Ravine and bear witness to the work of the local council. But Duvalier sent his sister in his stead, Camille was honored nevertheless. Interview with Pè Camille in Ravine du Roche, Limbé, 9 June 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Madame Vve. Horace Coriolan, Présidente du Conseil Communautaire des V.S.N. de Kenscoff to Son Excellence Monsieur Jean Claude Duvalier, 11 April 1980, Haitian Military Collection, the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division at Schomburg, NYPL.



corps *des VSN* we have dugout [*ombragé*] one part of the national road from Camp-Mary to Morne de Perice."<sup>38</sup>

Believing to be good policy at the time, Jean-Claude essentially banished the militia to labor alongside peasant councils in mainly roadwork. The regime was compelling *makouts* to labor as a way to control and distract them from actions of indiscipline and terror. It almost seemed as though the regime was attempting to transfer peasant support from the *makout* militia to the more benign community councils. Put simply, the regime wanted peasant councils to be like the *makouts* – but without guns. As the regime attempted to ooze independent violence out of the militia, *makouts*, in turn, began to acquire ideas of collective organizing associated with community councils.

On 24 May 1985, the *makout* commander of Anse-à-Galets Carment Normil telegrammed Jean-Claude to highlight the local growing sense of collective action derived from *makout*-led development. "We sincerely hope everyone appreciates," wrote Normil, "the just value of these many achievements in service of collectivity to the action of development under the sign of solidarity."<sup>39</sup> Jean-Claude thought that this approach would solve the problem of checking the influence of the *makouts*. He neither fathomed, nor predicted that councils and actions centered on development would be the sources of popular revolt that undermined the

---

<sup>38</sup>Jeune Fritz, Resp. de Agence de Camp-Mary, 28 September 1982, in folder titled "Extension," District Agricole de Saint Marc (DASM).

<sup>39</sup> "Nous souhaitons ardemment pour tout un chacun apprécie à leur juste valeur ces nombreuses réalisation au service de la collectivité à l'action du développment placé sous le signe de la solidarité." Carment Normil, Commandant VSN Anse-à-Galets to Son Excellence Monsieur Jean-Claude Duvalier, 24 May 1985, Box 1, folder Southern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

regime and contributed to its eventual downfall.



Figure 6. Comic of Militia (1). This comic shows a *tonton makout* telling another peasant about receiving instructions from a regime representative. The peasant on the left declares, "Bravo, this is good news!" The *makout* continues: "He also said, if a militiaperson has a gun in one hand, this militiaperson must have a working tool or a tree-plant in the other hand. The gun is for protecting the revolution. The tool is for labor for the country. The tree-plant is for reforesting the communities."



Figure 7. Comic of Militia (2). *Makouts*, armed with revolvers, join peasants at community council meeting. Leaders of the peasant councils announce to the peasant-makout crowd: “On Friday, we’ll put our hands together [to labor]. Everyone come with your working tools: pikes, shovel, machetes, pickaxes...”



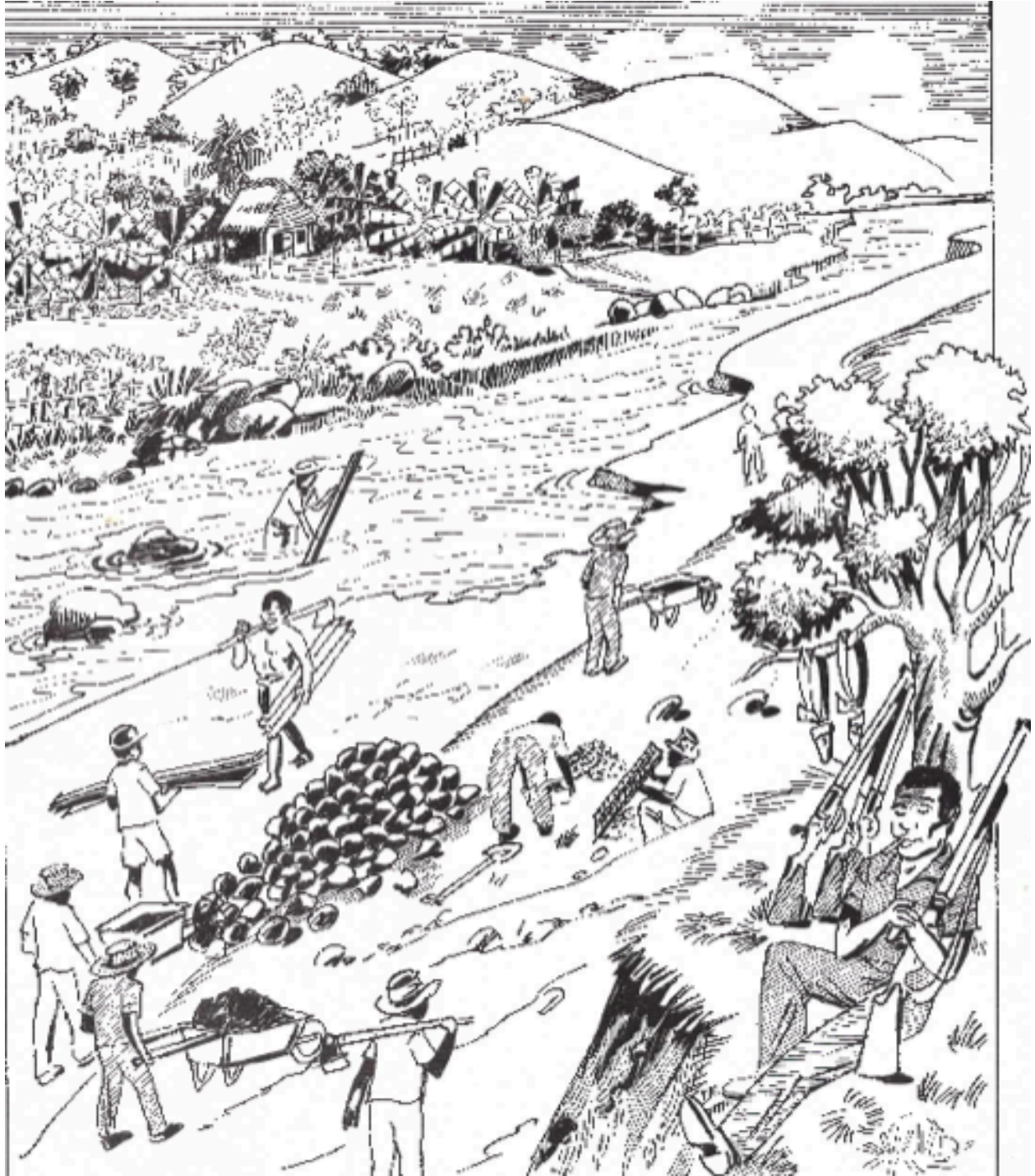


Figure 8. Comic of Militia (3). *Makouts* and ordinary peasants labor on a development project, while another *makout*, at the far right, guards the guns of the peasant-*makout* laborers.<sup>40</sup>

\*\*\*\*

<sup>40</sup> BWA CHANDEL: *Tronpet Janklodis*, July 1979, 19-24, in my possession.

Jean-Claude had few reasons not to predict that his undoing would partly originate from peasant councils. They were deeply part of the regime's patronage. A striking illustration took place in 1980 when peasant councils supported the regime's decision to arrest Sylvio Claude who advocated for democracy in Haiti. Between the late seventies and early eighties, the U.S. government, under President Jimmy Carter, encouraged the Duvalier regime to open up the country to democratic forms of expression and governance. The Duvalier regime grudgingly complied and began to allow local elections and forms of popular dissent. The regime permitted Sylvio, for example, to establish an independent democratic political party. But Sylvio's was jailed for criticizing the regime. As Sylvio sat in prison for testing the limits of democracy, peasant councils throughout the country sent letters to the president that endorsed the arrest of Sylvio.

Located in the remote northern half of the southwest region of Arbecrot, peasants telegrammed the president: "COMMUNITY MOVEMENT OF SPEACK 4TH RURAL SECTION OF ABRICOTS, WE VOW THAT WE ARE GLAD FOR THE MEASURE OF FORCE OF ORDER FOR THE ARRESTS OF MISTER SIVIVIO CLAUDE WHO WAS WORKING AGAINST PEACE AND SECURITY OF OUR GOVERNMENT."<sup>41</sup> Living in Chardonnières, located on the bottom half of southwestern peninsula, peasant councils asserted, "EVERY MEMBER URGES YOU TO GOVERN THE NATION FIRMLY, THEY LEARNED THAT THE MAN CALLED SILVIO CLAUDE WAS ARRESTED FOR CREATING DISORDER. WE APPLAUD WHAT YOU HAVE DONE."<sup>42</sup> In the northern region of Milot,

---

<sup>41</sup> Prezidan Daniel Alexandre, Vis-Prezidan Brivy St-Louis, Sekrete Rouzier Baseneuve to Jan-Klod Divalye, 18 October 1980, FAd'H-Miscellaneous1975-1985,HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Jean, Velius Charles, Jolette Andre, and Lelio Azor, Jean-Claude Duvalier, 17 October 1980, FAd'H-Miscellaneous1975-1985,HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

peasant councils "WERE INFORMED BY THE PRESS OF THE DISPOSITION TAKEN BY THE FORCES OF ORDER AGAINST THE CITIZEN SYLVIO CLAUDE, PLEASE BELIEVE WE FIRMLY AGREE."<sup>43</sup> From the northwest, peasant councils lauded, "COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL OF MARE ROUGE SEND YOU MANY COMPLIMENTS AND CONGRATULATIONS FOR ARRESTING THAT MAN... YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE AFRAID WE SUPPORT YOU FIRMLY."<sup>44</sup> Despite being initially conservative, many peasant councils grew into subversive organizations. This process started with council's quotidian efforts to mobilize their communities for a better future.

Membership in a community council was an apprenticeship of sorts where peasants learned to identify local issues and convey them to state officials. The organizational structure of community councils was typically hierarchical. A committee board usually composed of a president, vice-president, secretary, under-secretary, delegates, and selected advisors. The origins of this particular structure remain unknown. But the adoption of such an executive organizational structure has been common in social, musical, mutual-aid, and religious societies in the countryside. Some community councils claimed to be institutionally democratic by which its committee boards were elected by its peasant members, while other councils merely stated their formation without explaining the mechanism by which its leadership was formed.<sup>45</sup>

Community councils were often connected to multiple chains of hierarchies that linked their communities to various elements of the state, foreign development agencies, and Christian missionaries. Each of these institutions provided respective agents and resources for community

---

<sup>43</sup> La Fédération des Conseils Communautaires de Milot to Jean-Claude Duvalier, 21 October 1980, FAd'H-Miscellaneous 1975-1985, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>44</sup> President Bolivra Cherizol and Secrétaire Alberon Dervil to Jean-Claude Duvalier, 19 October 1980, FAd'H-Miscellaneous, 1975-1985, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>45</sup> In the Artibonite valley, one federation council claimed that its council was popularly elected. "*Le Conseil est formé de treize (13) leaders choisis dans les différentes zones d'activité du District. Ils sont élu par les paysans eux-mêmes.*" Status du Conseil Consultatif Régional, 26 March 1980, in folder titled A Classe, DASM.

councils. And each organization hired and trained intermediaries and specialists to provide technical support to peasant councils. State agents, political elites, missionaries, lay clergy, and representatives of foreign agencies often patronized these meetings. But peasant councils remained state-sponsored organizations and maintained close ties with the Haitian state.

No longer marginalized in the countryside, peasants had easier access to multiple representatives of the state and they utilized these figures for claims making. State agents designated as *animateur* or *encadreur* were intermediaries between peasant councils and state agencies associated with agricultural development. This meant that as long as community councils established themselves in any given region, its members were now directly linked to the national state and political elites. Peasants often met with agents and this established frequent dialogue between state and rural villages, no matter how remote. One state agent's report shows his scheduled meetings in the barely known rural section Medòr of Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite. In June 1980, for example, the agent planned to hold meetings throughout Médor's peripheral villages that probably only he and its inhabitants knew by name, including Férièr, Potemeau, Jacquot, Bessandière, Manuel, Caspin, Bazin, and Marinette.<sup>46</sup>

These meetings taught peasants to organize themselves and convey issues to the state. To be sure, state agents sometimes exploited community councils. Peasant labor was utilized not only for development public work projects; they were employed to labor for the personal advancement of the very local agents who were supposed to help peasant councils. But organizing often taught peasants how to petition the state when these intermediaries failed in their assignments. On October 1980, the community council of Fiefie wrote to the supervisor of agricultural agents in Artibonite valley. "You sent Exalem Besi as an *encadreur* to work with us

---

<sup>46</sup> Joanès Jérôme, Encadreur de Médor to l'Agronome du District de St. Marc, 22 August 1980, DASM.

– in Fiéfié," council leaders Rosiéna Joséné, Conessance Lundigène, and Ocène Dorval reprimanded, "this person has done nothing with us."<sup>47</sup>

By that juncture, peasant councils acquired a technique of writing collective signed petitions to address local issues. Aside from accessing the state through intermediaries, peasant councils drafted petitions that communicated their interests directly to the state. To be sure, peasants writing letters to the state was nothing new; this was part of their political tradition since the nineteenth century. Relatively new during the Jean-Claude period, however, were signed petitions that councils adopted to convey collective concerns to the state. In the Jean-Claude period, one sees the growing preponderance of collectively signed petitions that suggests the spread of organizing influence that derived from council activities.

Strangely, council mobilization and collective action was partly the byproduct of roadwork. Peasants organized themselves for something so innocuous as roadwork, but learned to petition the state to obtain tools and materials for roadwork. Community councils were becoming politically empowered but power was emanating from seemingly laborious work that rarely saw sustainable results. Despite it all, they learned that the state was chiefly responsible of their wellbeing and began to press for their needs. Roads were often a top priority. In a letter undated but probably written in 1984, the community council in Sonyin in the Artibonite valley wrote a petition in Haitian Kreyòl to local state agronomist about the lack of local roads. "Dear agronomist it is with great pleasure that I lower my head before you to tell you the problem in Sonyin," council leaders Robert Céphacile, Oksidan Dort, and Wilner Céphacile wrote deferentially. The local road was falling apart and the council requested pikes and machetes to "open the route." They pleaded, "for we have made several requests already we have not

---

<sup>47</sup> Rosiéna Joséné, Prezidan; Conessance Lundigène, Vice Prezidan; Ocène Dorval, Secrétaire, 1 October 1980, in folder Animateur Rurale, DASM.



succeeded in anything, we put this before you as well. Because now we will be in the rainy season there is no road at all again this is why we profit from this occasion to write you, *Oke Mèsi*."<sup>48</sup>

Years of keeping their grievances to themselves, peasants were now collectively complaining to the state. The community council representing localities of Grand-Fond and Bedène also in the valley of Artibonite complained of local problems, "we are in need of a communal school, a domestic economic center, we are in need of some metal pipes to place in the irrigation canals whose [water] has cut our road."<sup>49</sup> On 2 April 1984, council leaders Madame Vilnac Civil, Anulus Chanilus, Thomas Elvius, and Stalictos Carlil wrote to local agricultural agents, "*Monsieur le Directeur* of the District, We the members of the Community Council of Damier 5eme section Verettes, expose to you what follows, my *Directeur* we come to solicit a small demand of collection [*cotisation*] concerning a road that we want"<sup>50</sup>

Sometimes community councils built roads for the state and requested favors in return. On 9 September 1985, the "*Fraternité*" community council in the section Carrefour La Mort, located right outside Cap-Haïtien, wrote to President Jean-Claude demanding about 645 hectares of state-owned land. "Excellence, we have already made many strides, the road of Carrefour La Mort, Haut Du Cap is in the process of being decongested," bargained council members. And they also utilized the occasion to form a closer bond with the regime, "For more details, we will

---

<sup>48</sup> "*Chè d'agonòm se avek yon gran plezi kem bese tèt mwin devan ou pou di ou poblèm kiginyin non Sonyin...konsèy kominotè zon nan nou ta vle ouvri rout la min nou manke zouti. tètòm pikwa pèl manchèt...kòm nou fè plizie demach deja nou pa reyisi anyin nou mete sa devan-ou tou. paske kounye a nou pral nan epòk de lapli pap gin rout di tou Oke Mèsi.*" From Robert Céphacile, President; Oksidan Dort, Vice Pres; Wilner Céphacile, Secrétaire to Monsye d'agonòm Lésly Matély, undated but in a folder with documents all dated in 1984, in folder Correspondences Locales, DASM.

<sup>49</sup> From Martin Pelisien, President to Lesley Mathely, Mme Vital, and Roumain Aphine, 22 June 1984, in folder Lettres Reçue, DASM.

<sup>50</sup> Madame Vilnac Civil, Stalictos Carlil, St. Anulus Chonilus, and Choman Elvius to Directeur du District St. Marc, 2 April 1984, in folder Lettres Reçue, DASM.

like to form a delegation of four persons to make contact with You."<sup>51</sup> And we can see why this bond meant the world to Carrefour's community council. Only a couple of months later, they were employing their bond with the regime to protect a member from the harsh penal system. "The President of Council Mr. Phillebert J. Botex sends a cordial salutation to you, he asks you to please render *la justice* to their member Jonson Lubin being a delegate of this council because we are all brothers of Jn-Claudist," the councils pleaded the local judge of peace.<sup>52</sup> Building roads for the state and for the peasant economy did not depart from the conservative politics of the regime. In so doing, however, peasants were empowered by engaging the state.

Collective petitions to build roads and for other development projects taught peasants to forge new networks with the state to take action against the injustices of the police and the penal system, which was installed by the occupation. Relying on the *makouts* and now councils, peasants collectively took action against the police state. In the seventies, CARE reported that community councils around Jean Rabel and Anse Rouge were subverting the authority of the rural police.<sup>53</sup> The catholic priest *Père Frantz Grandois* was the president of a federation organization that united the community councils in the rural sections of Desarmes of Artibonite to collectively labor on development projects. This federation also helped council members in

---

<sup>51</sup> "La marche de son activités dont le principal but est de pratiquer l'agriculture, sur une grande échelle soit sur 1,500 carreaux de terre. Dans les 1,500 carreaux, nous avons besoin 500 carreaux en attendant. Les cultures qui seront exploitées sont: pistache, manioc, patate, figue-banane, tomate, chadèque, orange, piment, tabac, choux, pomme-de-terre, oignon, carotte, aubergine, melon et l'établissement d'un endroit pour l'élevage. Les conditions climatiques de la zone seraient favorables à l'exploitation de ces cultures s'il vous serait possible de mettre à la disposition du Conseil Communautaire un terrain pour entreprendre ces activités: le terrain envisagé a été occupé par l'état depuis 1930. Excellence, nous avons déjà fait beaucoup d'efforts, la route de Carrefour La Mort, Haut du Cap est un en marche pour décongestionner la ville du Cap avec les poids lourds. Nous avons besoin du concours d'un poste de police à Carrefour La Mort. Excellence, nous comptons beaucoup sur Vous pour la réussite de tous ces projets et Vous pouvez toujours placer votre confiance en nous, parce que nous sommes vos fidèles sincères. Pour plus de détails, nous aimerions former une délégation de quatre personnes pour prendre contact avec vous." See, President Fondateur Philbert Botex and Vice President Claude Davilmar to Jean-Claude Duvalier, 9 September 1985, no folder, TP, Quartier Morin.

<sup>52</sup> Unrecognizable name to Tribunal de Paix de Quartier Morin, 11 November 1985, TP, Quartier Morin.

<sup>53</sup> "File Evaluation Report Haitian American Community Help Organization (HACHO)," April 13, 1972, CARE Records, MssCol470, Box 101, SASB, NYPL.

matters related to local injustice. When a local community council sought the "unjust arrest" of a peasant in 1978 to be rightfully addressed, they complained to the judge of peace in Desarmes. But the judge reportedly turned them away, "Committees are not *chef*, you can go [complain] on the national radio."<sup>54</sup> The council and Grandois promised to take their complaints wherever until justice was found. The archival record goes cold. But we do know there were instances in which the state responded favorably to council complaints.

One Verrettes community council compelled agricultural agents to convey their complaints of an abusive local police *chef de section*. In a letter of complaint dated on 10 November 1978, agents wrote to the military chief in the capital, "this Agent of Rural Police constitutes an obstacle to the action of the community council that is victim... of abuse of all sorts [and the police agent] equally perpetrates against certain honest citizens of the localities of the section." Several months later, the military responded with good news, "we have received your letter of complaint...related to the abuse of which certain *paysans* of the 6eme Section Rurale of Verrettes, on the part of the Agent of Rural Police of this locality." The letter went on to state: "In response, we inform you that the investigation carried out in this case has revealed your grievances are founded. Instructions have been passed that the appropriate disciplinary measures be taken against the guilty." On 10 May 1979, the Verrettes chef de section Morel Lanis Dorilus was discharged for "undesirable" behavior (though, as we shall see, he will make a comeback after Aristide was forced out of power).<sup>55</sup> Indeed, peasants learned that their collective action could result in retribution.

---

<sup>54</sup> Cepha Celestin to Directeur du Service de l'Administration, 9 January 1978, untitled folder, DASM.

<sup>55</sup> ODVA to Chef d'Etat-Major Roger St. Albin, 10 November 1978; Assistant Chef d'Etat-Major Mercius Rivière to Directeur Générale ODVA, 20 April 1979; Lettre Renvoi, 10 May 1979; all documents in CS Morel Lanis Dorilus dossier, folder 12035, FAd'H, ANH, PauP.

Living in the adjacent villages of Cassé-Pieds and Petite Place de Golatha, council members were threatened with dispossession because of non-payment for rented land on which they squatted. Members of the council invited the local tax officer to a meeting where they all could discuss a late payment plan. But the tax officer did not reply to the council's invitation and was in the process of renting the said land to a local elite figure. On 8 November, over twenty council members signed a petition that deplored the actions of the tax officer. Written in the popular language of Haitian Kreyòl with a mix of French orthography, peasants decried, "how can you rent this land to a powerful person (*gran nèg*). Where will you send us because we are *pauvre*." With a growing sense that they had ties to the central government, these peasants threatened to take their complaint to the capital. "If you don't give us a response, because the day has arrived for us to *travail*, we will be obliged to go to Port-au-Prince on foot so we can know," they asserted.<sup>56</sup> The tax collector finally responded to their letter of complaint but was unsympathetic.<sup>57</sup> No other records could be found to know how this conflict transpired. However, we do know that traveling on foot from Jean-Rabel to the capital of Port-au-Prince would have taken a couple of days. Still, such a journey was made possible and passible because of the very roads the councils had built. Furthermore, peasants marching to the capital became conventional in the era of peasant councils. For example, *Beauséjour* (in *Léogâne*) peasants Jean Jovain, Charine St. Lot, Itana Dentic, Louis Geneus, Jean-Claude Jovain, and Louis Menelas traveled approximately 18 miles to the National Palace in Port-au-Prince to make a complaint against their local police *chef de section*, Mercy Rogene. Peasants utilized the roads, which they built, to transport themselves to centers of power in order to make claims.

---

<sup>56</sup> Les Conseils Communautaires Cassé-Pieds, Petite Place, and Golatha to Arsène Roche, 8 November 1981, folder titled Tarif Communal, DGI/Impôts Locatif in Jean-Rabel.

<sup>57</sup> Arsène R. François to Conseil Communautaire de Cassé Pieds, Petite Place de Golatha, 19 November 1981, folder titled Tarif Communal, DGI/Impôts Locatif in Jean-Rabel.

Community councils were acquiring different tactics of collectively engaging the state. Petitioning the state was initially the most favored. To be sure, peasant letters to the state had always existed since the nineteenth century. But during the Duvalier period, soon after councils began to proliferate, collectively signed petitions appear in great numbers in various Haitian archives. In other words, collectively signed petitions can be read as barometer of peasant political action. Sometimes, peasants collectively signed petitions without mentioning any council influence. Nonetheless, collective petitions became in vogue and appear in greater frequency during the era of councils. Thus, the practice had spread throughout the countryside.

After a series of hurricanes devastated the southwestern peninsula, various state officials received collectively signed petitions by peasants requesting state assistance. In 1981, fifty-five peasants from Roseau, located in the southwest peninsula, signed a petition to their local tax collector asking that land taxes for the year be postponed because the natural disaster had prevented them from paying. "My good *chers* authorities," the peasants urged, "we *paysan* brothers we signed [this letter] to make this demand regarding the situation of this Hurricane...we are in the impossibility to pay."<sup>58</sup> A couple of years later, a hurricane compelled another letter in which peasants asked the local prefect of Jérémie to deliver news to Jean-Claude that their peanut, plantain, coconut, and sugar cane harvests were swept away by a hurricane. "The weather caused much devastation...This is why we ask the [prefect] of Jérémie to intervene in our favor," signed Lestage Auguste, Jean Reynald Pierre, Jean Richard, Rosie Auguste, Cériane Louis, Oferne Augusta, Elie Etienne, Antoine Pierre, Villfranche Antoine, Jonny Paul, Mona

---

<sup>58</sup> 2ème section Commune Roseaux to Directeur Projet de Jérémie and Directeur Général des Contributions de Port-au-Prince, 10 March 1981, in folder Formule BC-114 Renouvellement de Tickets Ex 84-85, DGI, Jérémie.

Paul, Jeannine Juste, Marc Pacaud, Jean Gérard Richard, Anon Boyer, Mme. Paul Dorestant, Dieuseul Auguste, and Serge Auguste.<sup>59</sup>

The growing number of collectively signed petitions, whether identifiably endorsed by councils or not, were most likely connected to council organizing activities. In Cotelette of Sainte-Suzanne, for example, peasants signed a petition against their local police *chef-de-section*, but made no mention of their membership in the local community council. The facts came out during a military investigation. On 20 May 1983, peasants Essaie Pierre, Hercule Charles, Auguste Augustin, Steril Pierre, Alexis Augustin, Dessalines Exantus, Rosemar Cherivière, Decimé Joseph, Enos Joseph, and Marcel Jean-Almonord signed a letter of complaint to the military commander of the northeast department. The letter complained that the presence of a reputed thief had always led to the disappearance of cattle in Cotelette. Their local chef, according to the letter, was to blame because he failed to apprehend the suspects.

In a subsequent military investigation, the police *chef* admitted that he thought the entire affair was unrelated to his performance, but tensions were a manifestation of a power struggle between the police and the local community council. "During my incorporation in the Armed Forces of Haiti, I was supported by the committee of the community council of the area, after my engagement, they remained persuaded that I would be at their caprice," the police *chef* declared to investigators. The signees of the petition were members of the local community council, but neglected to mention their council ties in the letter. In any event, the regime's creation of state sponsored peasant-based organizations helped foster new peasant subjectivities. The historian David Nicholls acknowledged, "Community Councils were also set up to give the appearance of

---

<sup>59</sup> Lestage Auguste, Jean Reynald Pierre, Jean Richard, Rosie Auguste, Cériane Louis, Oferne Augusta, Elie Etienne, Antoine Pierre, Villfranche Antoine, Jonny Paul, Mona Paul, Jeannine Juste, Marc Pacaud, Jean Gérard Richard, Anon Boyer, Mme. Paul Dorestant, Dieuseul Auguste, and Serge Auguste to Préfet de Grand' Anse et de Tiburun, 8 February 1984, Box 4, folder FAd'H Various Reports, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

local democracy. Most of these controlled by Duvalierists and had little effect. Others, however, grew teeth and became centres on which significant demands for change were focused."<sup>60</sup> They also became organizations of peasant protest and revolt that would overthrow the Duvalier government.

\*\*\*\*\*

What Haitians came to refer as the *dechoukaj* or uprooting, which forced the Duvalier regime out of power in 1986, was not merely a movement against explicit forms of state repression as many scholars have argued. It was not simply Haitians acting out against the brutality of the *tonton makouts*. The *dechoukaj* was also not set off by a single event in 1986 where soldiers killed two schoolboys in Gonaïves that prompted protests. Rather, beginning in the 1980, popular protests, sparked by various motives, were already percolating throughout the countryside. The nature of peasant protest was collective and derived from community council activities. Thus, in effect, the *dechoukaj* comprised a number of various protests between 1980 and 1986 that the regime could no longer contain. It was, in part, a multitude of scattered, but communal peasant protests that the regime failed to mediate. And these acts, sometimes intentionally subversive and sometimes not, converged and weakened the position of regime to allow its fall from power. It is noteworthy to mention that Haitians not witnessed widespread rural protests since the U.S. occupation. However, the spread of councils helped liberate subdued rural traditions of revolts that convulsed the state into disrepair. Ironically, the fight against the regime came from those complicit in its formation.

Some peasant councils protested for conservative reasons. On 29 June 1982, the presidents of a federation of community councils in Cerca-la-Source organized 150 council

---

<sup>60</sup> David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (1979), xiii.

members to protest publicly the replacement of the coordinator of a local literacy coordinator. The local military commander of Cerca reported to superiors, "to a rhythm [played] on drums, bamboo trumpets, and conch shells all exhibited placards with the prescription '*Vive Jn-Claude DUVALIER Président* to all,' down with abuse, down with injustice."<sup>61</sup> Cerca peasants and their council leaders wanted the old literacy coordinator back, but the record does not explain why. In any case, Cerca peasants experienced public protest while approximating themselves with the Duvalier regime and drawing upon its sanctioned discourse of injustice against peasants to achieve a political goal. This form of protest was an early sign of what recurred frequently throughout the eighties that helped delegitimized the regime.

Christian missionaries and radical priests also played a role in influencing peasant councils to recognize their organizational potential to mobilize collectively and protest exploitation and abuse. Indeed, many politicized lay priests associated with Christian missions involved in development have often been accredited in the literature for creating independent peasant grassroots organizations called *groupement* or *gwoupman*. Indeed, some *gwoupmans* and priests led protests against the regime. However, scholars have argued that these *gwoupman*, under the influence of priests, were diametrically opposed to the conservative politics of peasant councils and *gwoupmans* –not councils– were largely behind the political revolution that overthrew the Duvalier regime in 1986. To be sure, priests played a part in galvanizing the masses and the state was aware of their radical influence.<sup>62</sup> But the regime was, paradoxically,

---

<sup>61</sup> Cazeau, COMDEP CENTRE to CHEMG, 1 August 1982, Box 2, folder Department HQ (Artibonite), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>62</sup> By 1985, military records demonstrate state surveillance of radical priest activities. In Cayes, clergy and lay priests (twelve Haitians and two foreigners) held mass which included Jean Bertrand Aristide on 13 May 1985 and protested an incident "qui a eu lieu à l'archevêché de Port-au-Prince entre le milicien et le prêtre Emile Joseph." See Préfet Farnès Raymond to Jean-Claude Duvalier, 14 May 1985. In the region of Baradères, "The Commander of the VSN of Azile and the municipal council of Baradères signaled in their reports the attitude of certain hostile Curés to YOUR government in my prefectural conscription. (*Le Commandant des VSN de l'Azile et le conseil municipal des*



responsible for establishing the necessary organizational framework from which the revolt had sprung. The supposed dichotomy between state-sponsored community councils and priest-led *gwoupman* was all but a fiction.

*Gwoupmans* were initially tied to peasant councils. In fact, many *gwoupman* organizations originally emerged out of community councils – quite literally in some cases. In the early 1980s, the leftist priest *Père* Jean-Marie Vincent, under the direction of *l'Equipe Missionnaire*, transformed northwestern peasant councils into a peasant organization called *Gwoupman Tèt Ansanm* (GTA) or Heads United Group that participated in the *dechoukaj* revolution and helped draft Haiti's first democratic constitution in the post-Duvalier period. But GTA derived from state designs.

*Père* Vincent, GTA's leading priest, was initially an *amateur* for peasant councils, a function that put him under the patronage of the state. In the late seventies, for example, *Père* Vincent wrote to the state requesting available land for peasant councils.<sup>63</sup> *Père* Vincent transformed the councils into GTA. Or as the leftist peasant Tonde put it, "Tèt Ansanm came out of the stomach of community councils."<sup>64</sup> This contrasts with the predominant view that *gwoupman* were independent of the regime and pushed for democratic change, whereas community councils pursued more conservative goals because they operated under the aegis of

---

*Baradère on signalé dans les rapports l'attitude hostile de certain Curés de ma conscription préfectorale à Votre Gouvernement."* The brave *Père* Valléry Rédécât of the Azile parish reportedly declared to armed officials of the regime, "No armed Authority is authorized to enter this church. (*Le Prêtre Valleéry Rédécât chargé de la paroisse de l'Azile a déclaré: Aucune Autorité armée n'est autorisée à pénétrer son église.*)" See, Préfet Werner Gauthier to His Excellence Monsieur Jean-Claude Duvalier, 15 May 1985, Haitian Military Collection, the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division at Schomburg, NYPL.

<sup>63</sup> Vincent's letter quoted in full: "*Je sollicite par la présente de pouvoir affermer 50 ha de terre du domaine de l'Etat, situé le long de la route départementale, reliant Jean-Rabel au Môle St. Nicolas à partir Bord de Mer, au fins d'agrandissement la surface cultivé par les Conseils Communautaire de la Rivière Bourra qui irrigue une trentaine d'hectares dans la zone. Je présente cette demande au nom des Conseils en tant qu'animateur et comme responsable des l'Equipe Missionnaire qui collabore à la formation de ces Conseils.*" Administrateur Jean-Rabel, Jean-Marie Vincent to Collecteur des Contributions de Port-de-Paix, 1 October 1979, in folder titled Société Réveil, DGI/Impôts Locale, Jean Rabel.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Desilien "Tonde" in rural section of Lacoma, Jean-Rabel, 13 June 2014.

the Duvalier state. This dichotomy has been misleading. In reality, *gwoupman* organizations were never entirely independent of the state. Instead, *gwoupman*, similar to councils, reported to the state and received resources from the regime and operated under its patronage.

Moreover, they were all bound up together in a complicated popular movement that contributed to the downfall of the Duvalier regime. In some cases, priests swayed both peasant councils and *gwoupmans* to organize and protest state injustice. On 14 October, a military official reported that a lay priest led both peasants groups in rural section Rivière-Mancelle of Gros Morne to protest market taxes that harmed the peasant economy. The officer complained, "A great disorder had exploded at the public market in Rivière-Mancelle...The Reverend *Père* Roger Guasdon Curé of the Parish of Rivière-Mancelle accompanied by a group of faithful, of *gwoupman* and community councils of this section, went to the public market of this locality to make *paysans* rise up concerning taxes." These peasant councils and *gwoupmans* were not divided in their protest against the state but rather "organized by the Révérend *Père* Roger Guadson and these [peasant] groups."<sup>65</sup> Efforts by peasant councils and *gwoupmans* fostered a culture of collective peasant protests that appear frequently in the military records.

Military reports show crowds of peasants protesting and revolting everywhere in Haiti but often neglected to mention their organizational ties. Given the fact that the provinces were in revolt for the first time since U.S. intervention indicates that councils and other peasant groups were behind the political tumult in the countryside. Jean-Claude and political elites of his generation never witnessed collective peasant protest or revolt. Large numbers of peasants had not been so openly subversive since the occupation that stamped out rural traditions of peasant

---

<sup>65</sup>Prior to the spread of councils and *gwoupman*, members of the tonton makouts resisted market taxes. Jean-Claude abolished the dreaded tax in 1973. However, the tax was reinstated in the early 1980s. Commandant du Sous-District Prophète Richecor to Commandant of Département Militaire de l'Artibonite, 16 October 1984, Box 2, Department HQ (Artibonite), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

revolt. By the eighties, however, the Haitian countryside exploded in protest and political conflict. Police brutality and the harsh penal system were chief among the complaints by the rural population.

In 23 September 1980, one Haitian officer reported that twelve "*paysans*" of Jacmel publicly protested their harsh arrest and forced to pay bribe to the rural police to be released. In order to "avoid conflict," the officer discharged the two police agents and transferred a soldier involved in the case.<sup>66</sup> On 11 June 1984, three soldiers arrived in a rural village in Saint Raphael and let off warning shots in the air to disperse "a group of individuals who threw rocks at them, in protest of the arrests" of local peasants.<sup>67</sup> The tide of collective peasant protests against imprisonment reached high levels to the extent that the military became gravely concerned. The *dechoukaj* or uprooting of the regime was being generated by collective peasant protests.

The Artibonite valley, in particular, erupted in protest and conflict. The nature of the protests often involved large numbers of peasants in the Artibonite where many local peasant councils and *gwoupmans* labored on irrigation maintenance. The regime's revitalization of the Artibonite irrigation system in the seventies prompted the proliferation of peasant groups but also conflict around land ownership and the distribution of water throughout the valley. For example, peasants collectively organized to protest unfair litigation of land disputes. After the prosecutor performed land speculation on a portion of litigated land in the locality of Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite, a "group of peasants" of the region marched to the municipality of Saint-

---

<sup>66</sup> Jean Enock Cleraine to Commandant du Département Militaire de l'Ouest, 28 October 1980, Box 2, HQ North-West Dept. HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL..

<sup>67</sup> Figaro to CHEMG, 11 June 1984, Box 1, folder Northern Military District, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

Marc and "threw rocks and chunks of wood at the prosecutor's office." Soldiers had to let off two shots in the air to disperse the crowd of peasants.<sup>68</sup>

Other Artibonite peasants organized against the ODVA that was previously co-managed by the Haitian state and U.S. development agents in the 1960s, but solely administered by the Haitian state officials in the Jean-Claude period. By that juncture, the ODVA suffered from serious corruption. On 6 June 1984, peasants "armed with rocks" attacked ODVA's rice factory and the army arrested twenty-six peasants. The twenty-six peasants arrested were taken to Port-au-Prince for interrogation. Those arrested included Jean-Pierre Noël, Saint-Pierre Thélusma, Roland Voltaire, Célavý Dasulma, Selondieu Darius, Elias Philémond, Lorcilía André, Léviús Dasulme, Ducheine Tasul, Dieseul Estimé, René Pierre-Antoine, Antoine Thelemarque, Joseph Florival, Dieufort Pierre-Charles, Robert Clervoyant, Luckner Exil, Dieunord Charles, Immacula Méthus, Pikee Jean, Laramartine Clerjuste, Augulus Myrthil, Michel Myrthil, Waney Saint-Fleur, Fervéús Pauléús, Tagrace Estimé, and Séide Hugette.<sup>69</sup> The record does not mention whether these peasants ever returned home, but their coordinated attack suggests an organizational nature that stemmed from council mobilizing activities, though the records do not explicitly state the case. More importantly, *makouts* could also have been among the peasant protestors arrested given that *makouts* were also bound up in council activities.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the late seventies, Jean-Claude Duvalier urged *tonton makouts* to join development projects and collaborate with councils and *gwoupmans*. In a state sponsored magazine written in Haitian Kreyòl, the regime published one of its speeches where it exhorted, "[*makouts*] were created to put their heads together [met tèt yo ansanm] with ... local committees, community

---

<sup>68</sup> Clerine to COMDEP ARTIBONITE, 2 April 1984, Haitian Military Records (FAd'H), Schomburg, NYPL

<sup>69</sup> Prefect Thomas Anderville to President Jean-Claude Duvalier, 6 June 1984, Box 2, folder Department HQ (Artibonite, South), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

councils, and all the community *groupman* in all the rural sections to work for development."<sup>70</sup> Many *makouts* heeded his call. *Makouts* were likely the signees of many petitions since many of them were also council presidents. But council presidents hardly mentioned their status as *makouts* when signing petitions. Still, as we have seen, oral sources and primary documents show us that *makouts* joined councils and constituted both the leadership and rank-and-file. *Makouts* and ordinary peasants together formed the membership of community councils where they learned organizing for local development and were probably included in the many nameless crowds of peasants described in official reports of peasant protests.

However, military records sometimes acknowledged that even *tonton makouts* led collective peasant protests. In 1983, a local court in the Artibonite valley returned 500 acres of land to the aristocratic family of Attié, which was previously nationalized by François Duvalier in the sixties. The peasants organized an attack on the associates of the Attié family situated on their land and *makouts* were behind the collective action. On 4 December, a military officer reported that "a group of *paysans* unhappy about the [court's] decision...armed with guns, machetes, stones, and clubs attacked representatives of the Attiés who fled after being shot at." And most importantly, "The majority of the assailants were headed by the VSN."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, *makouts* were bound up in the tide of collective protests because they often had deep ties with peasants and community councils. Although the regime encouraged *makouts* to integrate with councils as a way to curb their independent activities, these attempts obviously were counterproductive because *makouts* learned to mobilize with ordinary peasants that widened the peasant coalition which uprooted the Duvalier regime.

---

<sup>70</sup> "BWA CHANDEL: TRANPET JANCLODIS," July 1979, p. 10, in my possession.

<sup>71</sup> S/Clerine to COMDEP ARTIBONITE, 4 December 1983, Box 2, folder Department HQ (Artibonite), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

*Makouts* joined both councils and *gwoupmans* that exposed them to ideas of political organizing to achieve political goals. This was especially the case when *makouts* joined councils and *gwoupmans* influenced by radical priests who were infusing peasants with political discourses that inspired political agitation. On 25 May 1985, the *makout* commander Fritz Phillipe reported to President Jean-Claude that *Père* Jean-Marie Vincent and missionaries were spreading "ANTIGOVERNMENT" propaganda in Lacoma that lured "CERTAIN NAIVE VOLUNTEERS OF NATIONAL SECURITY" who had been "CORRUPTED."<sup>72</sup> Oral tradition affirms this *makout*-radical priest connection. *Père* Vincent has been remembered to have a close relationship with the *makout* commander and communal council president Florantin Louisaint. During the last hours of the regime in 1986 as it succumbed to popular revolt, *Père* Vincent dissuaded a mob of protesters from killing a local *makout* commander named Germain who was locally known as a genial figure but who failed to control some of his unruly *makout* underlings.<sup>73</sup> Germain connections with the *Gwoupman Tèt Ansanm* and *Père* Vincent saved his life as the regime fell from power. Many *makouts* became part of the agitated multitudes that uprooted the regime. By early 1986, *makout* loyalty to Jean-Claude waned. After a spokesperson of the Regan administration prematurely announced the departure of the president amidst popular protests, Jean-Claude, however, defiantly reasserted his position as president and ordered the army and *makouts* to suppress protests. Yet many *makouts* were part of the crowds protesting the regime, while others simply abandoned the militia.

On 2 February 1986, five days before the Jean-Claude finally announced his departure, for example, the army commander of Gonaïves reported that local "*Miliciens* deserted the

---

<sup>72</sup> Fritz Phillipe, Prefect-Commander of the Volunteers of National Security of the Northwest to His Excellence Monsieur Jean-Claude Duvalier, 25 May 1985, Box 2, HQ North-West Dept., HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Desilien "Tonde" in rural section of Lacoma, Jean-Rabel, 13 June 2014.

General Headquarters of the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*."<sup>74</sup> Others abandoned their weapons and uniforms. One *makout* in Lacoma, remembers throwing his pistol into a nearby river, disposing of his uniform, and going into hiding as crowds targeted many *makouts* for retribution.<sup>75</sup> The *makout* Georges of Limbé simply put his *makout* items aside and continued his life as an ordinary peasant. When I asked him why he did not bolt during the *dechoukaj*, he simply stated, "I did not utilize my position to do harm, only those who did harm were uprooted."<sup>76</sup> The *makout* lost their loyalty for the regime and, on 7 February, Jean-Claude Duvalier and his family finally abdicated from power and boarded a cargo plane that left Haiti which ended the twenty-nine year reign of the Duvalier dictatorship.

*Makouts* disappeared with the regime, but the militia would forever become associated with legacies of the regime's repression. Although accounts of *makouts* protecting them from tax agents in the Duvalier period, some market women accused tax agents as *makouts* to avoid paying taxes. On March 1986, for example, the tax director in Gonaïves reported that he "received numerous complaints related to the refusal of *marchands* and *marchandes* of small commerce in the Public Markets...abandoned the said tax... refusal justified by the presence of certain tax collectors who were volunteers of national security."<sup>77</sup> Market women associating the tax agents with *makouts*, though traditionally opposed to each other in the Duvalier period, were strategically employed to link tax collection with the fallen regime, and thus should be annulled. The military junta that Jean-Claude appointed to power before leaving Haiti would finally eliminate the market tax. The popular practice of naming state repression and exploitation as

---

<sup>74</sup> Commandant Benaud Monpoint to Chef Suprême 2 February 1986, Box 2, folder Department HQ (Artibonite), HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Pè Camille in the rural district of Ravine du Roche, Limbé, 9 June 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with André Georges in Limbé, June 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Directeur Général Raymond Fourreau to Collecteurs des Impôts, 17 March 1986, in file Correspondence, DGI/Impôts Locale, St. Michel de l'Attalaye.

*makout* tendencies have rightfully preserved the nefarious legacies of the Duvalier regime, but also has obscured the history of the militia and subsequent social conflicts in the post-Duvalier period.

In July 1987, for example, peasant members of the Gwoupman Tèt Ansanm (GTA) in the northwest were victims of a violent conflict that came to be known as the Jean-Rabel Massacre. Leaders of GTA, including the radical leftist *Père Vincent*, portrayed the massacre as a result of a political attack led by former Duvalierists, local landed elites, and *tonton makouts* who were attempting to suppress popular movements in the northwest. Although originating from state-sponsored peasant councils that included a number of *makouts*, GTA, by the post-Duvalier period, grew into a leftist organization and opposed landed aristocrats and state predation. They were known for seizing elite-owned land, for occupying tax offices to stop unfair taxation, and for thwarting court judgments against peasants. But the Jean Rabel massacre was specifically tied to the politics of foreign food dumping. GTA and *Père Vincent* opposed foreign food dumping with its imperialistic implications, whereas other peasant groups relied on food dumping for nutritional intake and for resale to obtain cash. Indeed, GTA's politics were good intentioned but undermined the peasant economy that desperately needed assistance.

On July 22, GTA members in Lacoma mobilized many of its members to visit peasants living the village of La Montagne where they planned to hold a "dialogue" over concerns related to "*manje sinistre*" or foreign food. Lacoma GTA members insisted in interviews that they were merely going to La Montagne for peaceful talks. Non-members such as Madam Jean-Gilles, on contrary, argue "They [GTA] went there to fight and they lost." Hundreds of peasants on both sides lost their lives, but reports suggest that GTA carried heavier losses.



GTA held the former *makouts* and authorities as responsible for the Jean Rabel Massacre. The military junta formed a commission to investigate the massacre and observed that the massacre, at its core, was tied socioeconomic issues nurtured in the Duvalier period. "The ultimate example of all the social and economic contradictions generated by the medievalo-capitalist means of production which characterizes the current stage of development of Haitian society." However, the commission also criticized narratives of the massacre as the result of *makout*-based repression. The report asserted, "the easy theories about Jean-Rabel... are simplistic and not supported by facts. There was simply no sign that the large landowning families played a role, and 'Macoute' had no real meaning, since Ex-Macoutes were found to be included in both 'Tèt Ansamb' and its antagonists." Indeed, as I have pointed out earlier in the chapter, GTA had *makouts* among its ranks. Placing the blame merely on the *makouts* for the massacre was a strategy to associate food dumping, the true source of the conflict, with the legacies of the Duvalier dictatorship. However, another legacy of the Duvalier regime included organizations such as the GTA, councils, and *makouts* that ultimately brought democracy to Haiti. These complexities explain why so many peasants played a large role in the democratic transition after the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship.

### **Conclusion: The Democratic Revolution and Military Repression**

Before fleeing Haiti, Jean-Claude's last action as dictator was appointing a military National Governing Council (CNG) with Lieutenant- Major Henri Namphy as its president. As president of the CNG, Namphy promised to oversee the national transition to a democracy. On 27 February 1986, the CNG announced plans to hold a constitutional convention as proof of its democratic intentions. Meanwhile, the CNG violent repression of popular protests and movements threatened to stall the transition. Although supporting human rights and democracy

in Haiti, the U.S. strengthened the position of the repressive the military regime. On the condition that the CNG support democratic progress, the U.S. sent the CNG \$400,000 in riot control equipment and \$4 million for military training.<sup>78</sup> However, with U.S. equipment and resources, the CNG continuously violated human rights and carried out violent repression that attempted to thwart popular democracy that evolved out of the popular protest in the Duvalier period. Despite the counterrevolution of the U.S.-backed military, protestors continued to confront the military authoritarian government and call for real democracy.

Between 31 January and 3 February 1987, in honor of the one-year anniversary of the *dechoukaj* uprising, grassroots organizations met in the capital to form a coalition that would advocate for democratic change and to design ways to influence the drafting of the constitution. The conference centered on finding ways to ascribe on the constitution protections for democratic representation and measures to defend national interests against foreign interloping. The coalition named itself *Premye Kongre Nasyonal Mouvman Demokratik Yo* or First National Congress of Democratic Movements (PKNMD). PKNMD was made up of about 800 delegates that represented over 320 organizations. The organizations represented feminist, human rights, and educational groups. PKNMD also invited international organizations such as Council Office on Hemispheric Affairs, Bread for the World, Coalition for Black Trade Unionists, National Emergency of Haitian Refugees, Society of Missionaries of Africa, Washington Office on Haiti, and etc.

Despite a show of locally urban-based and international organizations, peasant groups were overwhelmingly represented during the PKNMD meeting. According to PKNMD's press

---

<sup>78</sup>“A Democracy Through Terror: Chronology of Recent Events in Haiti and the U.S. Responses, January 1988” (Haiti 1987 Election Watch), folder Political Parties and Organizations, *Dechoukaj* Collections, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

announcement, "The 310 organizations that participated in the vote came from the majority of provinces representing 75% of *paysans* who form the Haitian population."<sup>79</sup> For the first time in Haitian history, the rural masses were given the opportunity to directly participate in the formation of national policy and politics. During the conference, peasants helped draft PKNMD's resolution that included calls for rural representation in national politics, a fair judicial system, and state assistance for the improvement of small farming. The resolution also included a condemnation of the CNG military government by calling it "a byproduct of the Duvalier regime and that it has clearly demonstrated its willingness to continue the same 'Tonton Macoute' regime."

In one workshop, PKNMD advocates took notes and printed partial quotes by peasants that served to strengthen the narrative that tied the CNG to the repression of the Duvalier regime and the *makouts*. "The Children of Duvalier are the CNG," one peasant was recorded to mention. Another peasant quote asserted, "Not only is Duvalierism is not finish but there is a whole aspect that's continuing to grow." "The rich people, military, and Macoutes have the land," went another peasant quote. One quote stated, "Peasants expropriated of land to give to Macoutes and Army People. It's a slavery system we've been in. We have smaller parcels of land." Personal memories of repression were also quoted. One quote stated, "They killed my father in 1966. they killed a lot of people in my region. What we must do is take out the roots." One somber quote read: "I was arrested twice by Jean Claude. I come here with hope."<sup>80</sup> These quotes affirm the atrocities of the Duvalier regime and gives voice to some of its peasant victims. Furthermore, these quotes form a narrative that sees the CNG as a continuity of the Duvalier

---

<sup>79</sup> Note de Press, 1 February 1987, PREMYE KONGRÈ NASYONAL MOUVMAN DEMOKRATIK YO, folder Political Parties and Organizations, *Dechoukaj* Collections, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

<sup>80</sup> Note de Press, 13 January 1987, PREMYE KONGRÈ NASYONAL MOUVMAN DEMOKRATIK YO, folder Political Parties and Organizations, *Dechoukaj* Collections, HMDC, SCRBC, NYPL.

regime and, therefore, delegitimizing the military as a supervisor of democratic transition. Nevertheless, the simplistic representations of the Duvalier regime obscures its complex legacies tied to the democratic transition. Or as one peasant quote put it, "The process of *dechouke* [revolt] needs to continue."

Indeed, some quotes reflect the complex interpretations made throughout this dissertation. Perhaps alluding to peasant access to state owned land under the rule of François Duvalier, one quote stated: "Under Papa Doc everything was owned by the state. Under the Jean-Claude, we started receiving foreign aid and came under the control of other countries." Another quote comes close to how *makouts* comprised the population, "Infiltration of the Macoutes was so thorough and complete that the people were thoroughly divided by suspicion." Finally, one peasant quote suggested that the *dechoukaj* revolt came out of peasant councils, "Movement came from the community base churches where people learned to speak." This last quote concedes that the *dechoukaj* was the byproduct of peasant community organizations but emphasizes under the tutelage of radical priests. Indeed, church organizations played an influential role, but were part of a convergence of processes that involved the regime's peasant policies and network of patronage. Even church organizations with ties to peasant councils operated under the aegis of the Duvalier regime, including the radical GTA led by *Père Vincent* in the northwest. Furthermore, peasant councils were the product of state plans to curb the *makouts* and church organizations profited from this approach by patronizing peasant councils and exposing them to radical ideas. Put simply, the regime provided priests with the instruments to influence peasants for political struggle and democratic change.

Furthermore, the regime reintroduced political organizing to peasants so that the regime could withstand attacks from the political opposition, but peasants also utilized organizing

themselves to first make claims and eventually strike the regime, causing it to fall. Ever since the occupation in which U.S. forces stamped out peasant traditions of revolt and mobilizing in the countryside, it was only not until the rise of Duvalier regime that we see the proliferation of peasant organizations in Haiti. After they were long disempowered, peasants were provided with the instruments to empowered themselves by the Duvalier regime bent on protecting its authority to rule. Paradoxically, this process was one of the lasting legacies of the Duvalier regime that has been hidden in conventional representations of the regime. After overtaking the state, peasants intended to turn Haiti into a democracy that was evident in their participation in drafting the national constitution.

In fact, peasants constituted the backbone of the democratic transition. After being invited to observe PKNMD meetings, the American Friends Service Community (AFSC), a U.S. based Quaker activist organization, seemed almost surprised at the substantial participation of peasant groups. During a PKNMD meeting held in March, the AFSC reported, "Another significance of the Kongre [PKNMD] is it represents the coming together of many of the groups for the Duvalier's leaving... The fact of the Kongre has given impetus to the calling of a meeting in mid-March of over 2,000 peasant groups in the country." Then, the AFSC report announced, "It is possible that a national peasant structure will emerge from the meeting." These peasant organizations were rooted in peasant-based groups created in the Duvalier period and, after Jean-Claude fled, formed a democratic political structure that influenced the drafting of the national constitution and kept up pressures for free elections. Throughout the rule of CNG, successive military juntas, and aborted provisional civilian presidents, peasant groups continued to organize for democracy. With *Père* Vincent's GTA playing a leading role, thousands of peasants finally helped elect in 1991 the populist and leftist priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide who won 67%

majority. However, the military general Raul Cédras, who was secretly supported by the CIA, overthrew Aristide and carried out a bloody campaign against rural leaders of democracy.

Cédras's military repression successfully extinguished the bright flame of what was Haiti's truly second democratic revolution that encompassed a majority of its rural citizens. Thousands of Haitians were killed including activists in the countryside that were part of the burgeoning grassroots political structure, advocating for democracy. Astrel Charles, the deputy of the northern town of Pignon and member of the National Agricultural and Industrial Party (PAIN), was murdered in December 1991 by police *chef* Illium Pierre.

In the mountaintop village of Plaisance, also located in the north and on the very day Charles was murdered, a police *chef de section*, serving under military authority, burned the homes of Deputy Jean Mandénave, a member of the National Front for Democracy and Change (FNCD), and sixty of his constituents who supported Aristide's candidacy. In Rossignol of Artibonite, the local police *chef* persecuted followers of FNCD's Deputy Samuel Milford.<sup>81</sup> Ever since Cédras-led military repression, the countryside has not recovered its rural democratic structure. One international observer remarked, "And far worse was the willing destruction of the nation's basic institutions such as political parties, labor unions, grass-roots organizations, cooperatives, community groups, and local government. These institutions were weak before, were knowingly emasculated or eviscerated."<sup>82</sup> The U.S.-backed Cedras and Haitian military, as the activist Jean Dominique once put it, "killed democracy."<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Anne Fuller and Amy Wilentz, *Return to the Darkest Days: Human Rights in Haiti Since the Coup: America Watch, National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, Physical for Human Rights* (Boston: Physicians for Human Rights, 1992), 12.

<sup>82</sup> "Strategy of Aristide for Social and Economic Reconstruction" (University of Kansas, 1994), iv.

<sup>83</sup> *The Agronomist*, directed by Jonathan Demme (2003; New York: ThinkFilmUSA), DVD.

Nevertheless, in this world of increasing violent repression, some peasant groups preserved tactics of organizing from peasant councils and protested local abuse by police *chefs*. In July, choosing to sign their names in Kreyòl, Verrettes pesants (in Artibonite) Chal Petijan, Jan Wobè Pòl, Fenel Jan, Josèf Siyon, Bobrun Sail, Jak Piè, Tousen Ogé, Lucius Vilus wrote a petition requesting the discharge of *chef* Morel Lanus (or Lanis”) Dorilus from the rural police. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Verrettes peasant councils had previously revoked Lanis in 1979, but he was apparently let back into the military rural police when Cedras seized power.

Thus, in 1993, Verrettes peasants combined tactics of peasant councils learned in the Duvalier period with tactic of open revolt learned in from *dechoukaj* period to run Lanis out of town. In a letter to Cedras, Verettes peasants explained their actions: “The last thing he did that made us send him away was when *Mesye* [Mr.] Lanis made *mad-am* Arius Henrius remove sheet metal [*tòl*] from the roof of her home to cover his house under the pretext that her husband had died which angered the population that stoned Lanis’ home.” In response to the petition, General Cédras ordered, in August 1993, the removal of police *chef* Lanis from the police rurale.<sup>84</sup> The removal of Lanis evidently drew upon a recent tradition of *dechouke*, but also from collective activities of peasant-based groups during the Duvalier period. This might be more evident when, in 1993, Hinche peasants who were members of the Council Committee Federation—a seemingly byproduct of community councils—sent Cedras a letter of complaint. They decried

---

<sup>84</sup> Chal Petijan, Jan Wobè Pòl, Fenel Jan, Josèf Siyon, Bobrun Sail, Jak Piè, Tousen Ogé, and Lucius Vilus to Lieutenant General Raul Cédras, 19 July 1993, in dossier of Morel Lanus Dorilus, D’agents de la Police Rurale (1971-1993), folder 12035, ANH, PauP.

against a local police *chef* named Louis Missionnaire and had him revoked for illegally extorting the local population.<sup>85</sup>

After negotiations between the U.S. President Bill Clinton's administration and Cédras, the military government dissolved. In addition, Aristide was permitted to return and resume the remainder of his presidential tenure. Upon his return, Aristide abolished both the national military and rural police in 1996. His move finally ended years of militarized oppression that targeted peasants since the occupation. Thus, Aristide's return led to the realization of some peasant grievances. However, the impact of Cédras' violent repression and U.S. meddling curbed the once populist agenda of the returned Aristide and suppressed nationwide enthusiasm for democracy. Nevertheless, everywhere in Haiti still lie peasant associations that, even though they are now lackluster as a mobilizing force and once more marginalized from national politics, remain vestiges of the Duvalier dictatorship, popular democracy, and U.S. intervention.

---

<sup>85</sup> Commandant District Jacques Clément to Commandant du Département Militaire du Centre, 10 May 1993, in the dossier of L'agent de la police Louis Missionnaire, Dossiers de carrière militaire (1982-1994), folder 12051, FAd'H, ANH, PauP.



## **Bibliography**

- Danticat, Edwidge. *The Dew Breaker*. New York: Vintage Books, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Brother, I'm Dying*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.
- Dash, Michael. *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1916*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981.
- Diederich, Bernard and Burt, Al. *Papa Doc: Haiti and Its Dictators*. Oxford: Markus Weiner (1990).
- Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: Aftershocks of History*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012.
- Duvalier, François. *Ouvres Essentielles*. Port-au-Prince: Port-au-Prince: Presses Nationales d'Haiti, 1966.
- Herskovits, Melville J. *Life in a Haitian Valley*, New York: Anchor Books (1971).
- Fatton, Robert. *Haiti's Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.
- Ferguson, James. *Papa Doc, Baby Doc: Haiti and the Duvaliers*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Ferrer, Ada. *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Heinl, Robert Debs and Heinl, Nancy Gordon. *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978.
- Holt, Thomas C. *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Honneth, Axel. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict*. Translated by Joel Anderson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
- James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Johnson, Christopher. "Secretism and the Apotheosis of Duvalier," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 74, No. 2, June 1, 2006.

- Leyburn, James G. *The Haitian People*. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1941.
- Lundahl, Mats. *Peasants and Poverty: A Study of Haiti*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Politics or Markets?: Essays on Haitian Underdevelopment*, New York: Routledge (2002)
- Madiou, Thomas. *Histoire D'Haïti*. Port-au-Prince: Editions Deschamps, 1988.
- Millet, Kethly. *Les paysans et l'occupation américaine d'Haïti (1915-1930)*. La Salle.
- Mintz, Sidney. *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rico Life History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Caribbean Transformations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Moral, Paul. *Le paysan haïtien: étude sur la vie rurale en Haïti*, Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1961.
- Nicholls, David. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Haiti in Caribbean Context: Ethnicity, Economy and Revolt*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1985.
- Plummer, Brenda Gayle. *Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902-1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Rodney, Walter Anthony. *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.
- Schmidt, Hans. *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing Like The State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press (1998).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Seeing Like The State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press (1998).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009
- Sheller, Mimi. *Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica*. Gainesville: The University of Florida, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Smith, Matthew J. *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Turits, Richard Lee. *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History*. California: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic" *Hispanic American Review* 82, no. 3 (2002): 600-601.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Haiti, State Against Nation: Origins and Legacy of Duvalirism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Weber, Eugen. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of the Rural France, 1870-1914*. California: Stanford University Press, 1976.
- Wolf, Eric. *Peasants Wars of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968.